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THE SACRIFICE OF THANKFULNESS

Sermons

BY

HENRY MELVILL GWATKIN, D.D.

LATE DIXIE PROFESSOR OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY

AUTHOR OF "THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD"; "THE EYE FOR SPIRITUAL THINGS," ETC

EDITED BY

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WITH A MEMOIR BY

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FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

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WASSEL J. ARNOY
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WASSEL J. ARNOY

TO
HIS OLD PUPILS
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK
WITH THE
PRAYER THAT THE INSPIRATION OF HIS
TEACHING MAY PASS ON
THROUGH THEIR LIVES
TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

L. DE L. G.

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MEMOIR

THE name Gwatkin is Celtic, but the family of which Henry Melvill Gwatkin came had long been settled in Herefordshire. His grandfather was an Episcopal clergyman in Virginia, but, when the Revolution came, it found him a "Tory"; he was in consequence unpopular; he suffered, it is said, in purse and person, and came to England. The son of the loyalist was also a clergyman, and at his vicarage of Barrow-on-Soar, in Leicestershire, his second son was born on 30th July 1844.

The child at an early age was left very deaf by an attack of scarlet fever, and the deafness drove him in upon himself. From childhood to the grave he was unlike other people—keener of brain and insight and memory, but hampered and cut off from common life by his infirmity. He could not hear the conversation at his father's table, and he was allowed to read at his meals. Diaries of the years 1855–56 survive, and a few illustrations from them may give the main threads of his life. When in July 1914 he gave up his work for the University of Wales, "I spoke," he writes, "of the threescore years and more from the first enthusiasm of the child for history to the intense, absorbing, enthralling, overpowering charm of studies lighted by the solemn dawning of the western sunrise." The old volume bears on its title page:—"Observations made during the years 1855–56 by H. M. Gwatkin. Vol. 1, 1855." The next leaf begins with the first observation. "March 5. Sirius.

Time: 6.30. Alt.: 30°. Colour: White. Remarks: First time I saw it." An asterisk indicates a caution, and a footnote adds to Time and Altitude the one word: "About." There follow references over several months to the habits of wasps, fortified by personal investigation with his sister Annie, and by quotations from Buffon—studies in Biblical "Chronology": "I was puzzled at 1 Chron. vi. 22-38"—lists of Persian kings, derived distantly from "Ptolemy's Canon," of other kings, and of events in Roman History, and of the recent Crimean War, all with dates—and Theological inquiry, "finding the differences between the Creed of Pius 4 and the 39 Art^s." A thunderstorm "reversed the poles of my compass." He goes hay-making, makes visits, and dislikes Swansea, "it is very dirty." He remarks upon "various readings" in Scripture, and notes that "the earlier MS. is more likely to be right." He holds Popery to be "opposed to knowledge." He gives lists of his books—very serious works, too. He draws plans and maps wherever he goes, but notes that his sketch of Rome's environs "is not very accurate." He "transcribes" his brother Tom's letter from school, "because it is so full of information." He translates six verses of the Greek Testament. By and by he goes to Shrewsbury school too, noting on the way "a hill where the first living animals (the *Lingula Lewisii*, for Mr. Lewis discovered it) lived," and on arrival the ways of the schoolboys ("the Scamps"). "I was greatly surprised that Dr. Kennedy allowed such insolence." More than once, at call-over, "I had the utmost difficulty to catch my name" or did not catch it. After a term or two the diary ends in school lists. It is a curious record for a child of eleven.

The explanation is partly the deafness, partly the wide range of interests of a father, who had been Senior

Wrangler and Fellow of St John's College, and who taught his deaf boy himself, and gave him his own admiration for Milton and Shakespeare, showed him how to use his telescope, and led him in other paths in which he walked to the end. The father was an Evangelical of a broad-minded type; he disliked the Tractarian movement, and was not at all ecclesiastical; he loved Astronomy and Geology, and resented the tone of hostility to science which was at that day observable in some quarters. The son had the profoundest belief in him. A father of so many and such living interests, bold in inquiry and sympathetic in teaching, could hardly fail to influence a boy of such gifts, and his example led him to Church History.

From April 1856 till he went to Cambridge, Gwatkin remained at Shrewsbury. "I never was a school pet," he wrote shortly after leaving. A deaf boy would hardly be one; and, besides, he lived away in lodgings with his brother Tom. He wrote later on of "the strange and lonely life I used to live," for after two years his brother left. But, perhaps, as in later life, a shy nature did not help him to see how much he was liked. Meantime he was looked up to "with much amused admiration." He was, we are told, a strange contrast to the ordinary members of the Sixth Form — bearded already, very grave, credited with unusual learning, and no athlete. "He took little exercise," writes an old school friend, "except when he went 'beast-hunting' to get objects for the microscope. He did a prodigious amount of reading of all kinds" — particularly medieval history — and "he had several hundred maps which he had made himself to illustrate his work. As a small boy I had the honour of drawing the outlines of a good many of these for him." He worked in school at

mathematics, till one day Kennedy took the form and found him out. "Gwatkin! you must be a scholar," he thundered, and promoted him to the Sixth and made him one. Greek verse Gwatkin achieved, but fifty lines of Latin "rep" would cost him five hours. He never could learn anything by heart. He could not trust himself on the Lord's Prayer from memory, but historical dates were a game with him.

His lifelong dislike for tobacco dates, it is said, from his brother's early experiments with it. Cambridge knew well what he thought of the "filthy fellows" who smoked. At school and at college he was now and again the victim of humorists, but the record stands that "we marvelled at his beautiful temper, and loved him the more."

The tie between Shrewsbury and St John's was a close one till dissolved by Parliament. Kennedy belonged to St John's, and to St John's he sent his best boys—J. E. B. Mayor, S. H. Burbury, H. G. Day, A. W. Potts, Samuel Butler (of *Erewhon*), Arthur Holmes, C. E. Graves, W. F. Smith, W. E. Heitland, and H. W. Moss were all well known for years at the College as Old Salopians. So, in October 1863, Gwatkin naturally went to the College of his father and his brother, where he "was immediately installed in one of the best sets of rooms in the College. I have four—a gyp room for devourables and coal, much as usual; a large bedroom; a very small study; and a huge keeping room. . . . St John's College is a grand old pile, full of ancient memories . . . you will find the new chapel of St John's completed, and a superb erection it will be"; and from it he passes to the Round Church, and a page of close-written learning on the Crusaders—"perhaps this is hardly to your taste, but for myself scarcely anything stirs up deeper

emotion than old ruins." Another letter to "dear Sister Solemnity" has a glowing defence of the Puritans and a picture of their settlement in New England, which shows the keen intelligence and the real imagination. "The river," to return, "flows some 10 feet below the great bow window of my keeping room, and a dirty river it is, too; this is the worst inconvenience of my position. Moreover, our dinner time (5.30 p.m.) is a great nuisance. I am never fit to work till 8 or 9, but then I always tire myself with gymnastics." It would seem that he lived on the ground floor in B New Court. "Down my keeping room chimney, from the rooms above, comes this same odour of learning, the odour which a learned mathematician's rooms should send forth, in the shape of a villainous perfume of tobacco, commencing at 11 p.m., and lasting an indefinite time." For another letter reveals what late hours he kept himself. In a Christmas Vacation, "here is my routine. 9½-11½, Microscope. 11½-1, Tramp. 1¾-2¾, Microscope. 2¾-5, Tramp, or reading Henslow, etc. 5-6½, Newspapers. 6½-8, Nominally Sap [apparently slang for what was afterwards called 'smuggling'—'my brother is doing his Sappatio Magna for the Classical Tripos,' he says above]—really Scribbling. 9-10½, Reading. A nice inviting way." A friend's letter of 1891 recalls "those readings on Sunday afternoons in Letter B of the First of Corinthians with Bengel—"my first real taste of what reading the New Testament was." These early letters—drafts, it would seem, which he copied out, for, life through, he could never write a thing once—show a good deal of the Gwatkin of forty years later—in phrase and in interests.

It was the legend of a later day that Gwatkin took four Triposes and lost a sense with each. He did take

four, and won a First Class in every one of them. He was bracketed 35th Wrangler in January 1867, bracketed 9th Classic in March 1867, and bracketed 3rd in Moral Sciences (here he took the Political Economy section), and finally, at Easter 1868, as a "Middle Bachelor," he won the only First Class in Theology. His University prizes culminated in the Tyrwhitt Hebrew Scholarship in 1869. What is more worth noting than the fabled loss of senses is the unusual fact that he kept a live mind and a real force of intelligence—did not lose sense, in fact, as often happens with people who shine in examinations—and was never buried under a dead weight of "brute learning." St John's elected him a Fellow in 1868, and he began that career of teaching which ended only with his death. "He taught me," writes a former Master of a Cambridge College, "the history of Greece and Rome for my Tripos, in the days before he specialized in Ecclesiastical History. I owe him much. My heart goes out in thanksgiving and prayer to God for him."

His quest of "beasts" took him to Guernsey in 1870; and in 1871 he became engaged to be married to Lucy de Lisle Brock, the daughter of a Guernsey clergyman. He had had the playful habit of calling women "vanities," and now a witty Fellow of St John's quoted St Paul to some effect—"The creature was made subject to vanity." Not unnaturally his vacations took him a good deal to the island. He delivered lectures there on Astronomy among other subjects, and, it is recorded, he gave the lady *Ecce Homo*. But marriage could not be till a sounder position than that of a private coach was attained, for in those days marriage vacated Fellowships. In 1874, however, the College made him Lecturer in Theology; he married, and settled in 8 Scroope Terrace, and the

rest of his life is the daily round of teaching and lecturing, diversified with his "beasts," and with visits upstairs to the drawing-room of "my vanity." He had three children. His only daughter he lived to see serving on one of the Government Committees for the improvement of English education after the war.¹ The elder boy died at eight years old. The younger son, who took the photograph prefixed to this volume, he nicknamed "Canine." It was his way to nickname most of the people he cared for—there were "It," and "Philosophy," "the Animal," "Tiger," and so forth.

From what has been written it will be seen with how wide a background and how broad and solid a training he approached Church History. So trained and so interested, he could not take narrow views nor decline into a mere specialist. The child, the undergraduate, and the man are the same—he never loses his interest in the past, but he never forgets the present in the past, nor could Jessopp's epigram be turned against him that "we study the past because we do not believe in the future." He specialized intensely; he accumulated a large library of books of research; accuracy was always his passion. But because past, present, and future were one, he was never the antiquary; he was the historian and the interpreter—the prophet, if the word can escape trivial suggestion. Carlyle's canon of "stern Accuracy in inquiring, bold Imagination in expounding and filling up," roughly indicates his attitude and practice, though a Cambridge man's training never gives him quite the freedom in the use of Imagination which men of other schools enjoy; like Carlyle's Antaeus, he is never happy without at least one foot on fact.

¹ He was a strong adherent of Women's degrees and Woman Suffrage.

He could never work at a thing for more than half an hour at a time; but his "beasts" gave him the relief he needed. At the microscope he lost his restlessness. The wasps of the old diary yielded to the Mollusca.¹ In this order he confined himself strictly to such families as possess a *radula* or "lingual ribbon," and "he would not look at a bivalve." The *radula* is an object of no great dimensions; its structure requires close microscopic work; but its value, as an object of study, lies in this, that it is characteristic, in formation and arrangement of teeth, not merely of the several genera but of individual species, and therefore forms an invaluable basis of classification. For forty years Gwatkin dissected out *radulæ*. All sorts of people were laid under contribution to send him snails—explorers, amateurs, curators of museums, planters, everybody. Now and then a missionary would send an unusually good parcel from Fiji or Central China, and he would say, with a twinkle which his friends knew very well, that there was some use in a missionary after all! His sight was good and bad at once; at long range he saw badly and hardly noticed anything—he never knew how anybody was dressed, and scarcely remarked height, or colour of hair, or did not mention it if he did—but at microscope work he was quite exceptionally good. The neatness and order that marked all his work and his life—and his handwriting, too—showed here in the beauty and skill with which he laid out his *radulæ* on his slides. "Thy servants the beasts," he once wrote, "are well, and muster now some 5400 species." He gave away large collections of them. The Manchester Museum has a big cabinet of them, with a most characteristic portrait of the giver hung

¹ In what follows sentences are taken from Dr A. H. Cooke.

hard by, with his cat in his arms. His main collection he bequeathed to South Kensington, while Cambridge was to have the first choice of duplicates. His eyes forbade the attempt to draw under the microscope, and he preferred to write of other subjects, or, we are told on authority, he would undoubtedly have made a far greater name in Science; but the name was not his object. The *radula* has now an established place in the study of the Mollusca, and that place is largely due to the restless scholar in the back room, sandwiching his "beasts" in among his Fathers.

The life of a teacher has little incident, but the quiet years were shaping his future, and his work culminated in his *Studies of Arianism*. "He was rather averse," writes an old friend, "from writing for publication, and he used to growl at the task, and refer to it as that 'pestiferous book.'" (The adjective survived in his conversation, linked to the same noun, for years.) It was published in 1882. "I am delighted with its general attitude," wrote Mandell Creighton (Sept, 3, 1884), "its fairness, its scholarly tone, its thoroughness. I think it is admirable. I only wish that I could ever do anything as good"; and he adds, "I hope the beasts answer to your expectations."

This letter was in acknowledgment of a gift, and the story behind it is familiar to readers of Creighton's life. But it belongs here, and it is best told in some letters which give the real Gwatkin.

"8 SCROOPE TERRACE, CAMBRIDGE,

"May 18, 1884.

"MY DEAR PROFESSOR CREIGHTON,—Will you allow your rival of yesterday the consolation of giving you to-day an individual and hearty welcome to Cambridge. I envy you the splendid work before you; but it is your work now, not mine.

"For twelve years I have taught Ecclesiastical History, I

may say, almost alone in Cambridge. I have worked faithfully and to the utmost of my power hitherto, and not, I trust, without success. And now that my work is taken up by stronger hands than mine, I pray the Lord of all History, before whom we both are standing, to give you health and strength and abundant blessing to carry on, far better than myself, the high and arduous work entrusted to your charge.

"For myself, I am ready to work under you, and to support you loyally in all that falls to me to do. So far as I know my own heart, no jealousy of yesterday shall ever rise on my side to mar the harmony and friendship in which I ask and hope to live with the first professor of Ecclesiastical History in Cambridge.—I am, yours faithfully,

"H. M. GWATKIN."

To Mrs CREIGHTON, *Aug. 25, 1884.*

"I never greatly coveted success or fame, yet I own it was not without an effort that I laid down before him [Creighton] my proper work in life. It was his right to take, and is freely his still. But I have learned—not for the first time when we kneeled together yesterday—that the gifts of God are far beyond our petty hopes, our seeming losses but the tender blessings of our Father's love."

To Mrs CREIGHTON, *April 7, 1886.*

"My disrespects to the cigarettes." [Creighton being the only man permitted to smoke in Gwatkin's study.]

"THE PALACE, PETERBOROUGH,

"*June 13, 91.*

"DEAR GWATKIN,—I had got it into my head that the Dixie election was to be held to-day, and was surprised to find by letters which came this morning that it had already taken place. I had no fear about the result for some time past, as I had some letters from electors which showed me how things were going. However, it is well to have things settled. You know that you have my heartiest congratulations and my best wishes for your success and happiness in your new work, which will be in many ways a continuation of your old work. But the new start will bring much that was hidden out of your stores. I used to say laughingly, soon after I came to Cambridge, that I wanted 'to form a society to work Gwatkin,' as though you were an imperfectly explored country. I think I was substantially right,

and I believe that you have much in you which only needs the sense of a new vocation to bring into shape. I am struck with the capacity which one possesses to develop new activities when called upon to do so. You will make a new start both in your life and in the young life of the Professorship, whose success will, I hope, be assured by your long tenure of it. If I gave it a start by the dignity which comes from the promotion of its first holder, you will be able to advance it by providing a standard history of the Early Church. Our love to Mrs Gwatkin. God bless you, Gwatkin, in all you do.—Yours ever,

“M. PETRIBURG.”

Gwatkin was now Professor—“the one ambition of my life accomplished”—and he held the Chair for twenty-six years. It carried with it a Fellowship at Emmanuel, and after seventeen years intermission, he was once more in that close association with a College which is the gist of Cambridge life. At first he was a little shy and reserved in mingling with his new society—a little shocked, some of them fancied, at the free-and-easy way in which historical questions were handled in the College parlour. He took his part regularly in College business, but his chief work was with his pupils. With them he had the gift of being soon on happy terms. He was straightforward and simple, and content to have men differ from him when he found them sincere. His learning and his guidance were always available; and after his death the mass of letters to his wife that spoke of what he had done for people, and of their gratitude and affection, was very large. Parliament itself was represented among them. Quite apart from his History teaching, there is a strong emphasis in these letters on the inspiration (the very word recurs again and again) which he gave men and women, how he helped them in the religious life, how he cleared up difficulties, and helped to make faith possible. Here,

above all, his honesty and his spiritual insight told. "Has it ever struck you," he once wrote, "that mine is a character of extreme reserve and unwillingness to express real feeling? Not a nice one I allow, but I do not think the difficulty grows on me with age—quite the reverse." He confessed to being "afraid of teaching," but asked "no higher work than to be a real help to any one." So when the violent took him by force, he appears to have welcomed it—"One of the best opportunities is to get a man to come home with me from the evening lecture." Some of these evening lectures were New Testament classes, reckoned by some as the best of his work.

"A word of kindness before you go," he wrote to a Newnham student. "A new life will bring new trials, but every trial brings its blessings with it. There is more revelation in life than in our thoughts, more teaching in the sober round of duty than in all our prayers. As regards teaching, the main points are thorough preparation—not of details, but of essentials, and unlimited patience—not to explain the difficulties, but to make your pupils find their way for themselves. They will do it, if you have patience to clear just the right points and no more. Keep your outline clear and formal, but let your method be as conversational as you can. It stimulates interest so much to have things told freely in [your] own words and not out of a book. After all there is something above the memory, beyond the intellect. Formal moralizing will not do; it must be the light of heaven shining through your life. If you are not yourself a sermon you will not make one. There is always one text in your power, and it will do to begin upon—unvarying tenderness to the wayward little ones, who are only a little lower than the angels."

He used to lecture in the hall of Emmanuel, walking restlessly to and fro on the dais. The vague bright glance of the shortsighted eyes—the strange articulation, desperately unintelligible for the first lecture—the incisive sentences, the brilliant pictures,

the revealing aphorisms, the lively asides, remain with the listener. Here is a specimen, which a former pupil noted :

“ And now let-me-introduce-you to Saint John of Worcester . . . better known as King than Saint . . . in fact, the monks called him John-the-Devil. . . . Now King John, I-should-describe . . . as-a-sort-of-wild-beast bound by *three chains* . . . which snapped one-after-the-other. The *first* chain was his *Mother-Eleanor* . . . ”

and so forth. And then, “ what is *called* common-sense, that is, snatch at the first argument that presents itself, and ignore the rest ” ; the Conservatives, at or after Nicaea, “ hot in pursuit of the last enemy that had ceased to be dangerous ” ; “ authority is simply the presumption of evidence ” ; so he spoke and his sentences stuck.

His principles are laid down in the preface to his *Early Church History* (in two volumes, 1909).

“ No attempt has been made to conceal personal opinions. The mere annalist may do it, but the historian cannot. . . . Events, and still more, men, cannot be understood without imagination and sympathy ; and imagination and sympathy involve opinions which (whether true or false) can always be disputed. Since then such opinions must of necessity colour the narrative ; they are better frankly stated than silently taken for granted.”

The reviewers sometimes disagreed with him ; the *Guardian* and the *Athenæum* fiercely attacked that book,—how much better was a certain Oxford work !—a work by the way with glaring inaccuracies. His attitude towards such criticism may be guessed from a letter of 1896 : “ Truth first: the [Theological] Board to the d . . . l if it gets in the way. We are not all bigots, or necessarily even churchmen. We put you on as a scholar, not to take a brief for Cyprian.” The help of that letter to a young lecturer can be imagined.

In Church matters it was the same. He did not take holy orders till some months after election to his chair.

"I have had no personal reason," he wrote to Bishop Westcott, "for remaining a layman, but my belief that I could do it [my work of teaching] better as a layman. But now that my work lies so much less among pupils, the matter seems to need consideration. Ordination would deprive me of much power for good, though not so much as it would have done some years ago. But it might give me much in other directions."

So he was ordained, but he remained Gwatkin,—a "horrid Radical," who had "learnt his Radicalism from the New Testament." In his *Open Letter in Reply to the Open Letter of the Bishop of Oxford* in 1914, he says :

"The Creeds have no independent authority, they seem like the outlines of history or astronomy. I cannot imagine them disproved ; but I can very well imagine them transformed by new light into something very different from what we now mean by them. The Creed was not disproved when we learned that the making of heaven and earth was a work of ages, or that the heaven into which our Lord ascended was not locally above our heads. I do not expect that the Article on the Resurrection will undergo a similar transformation, but it may. Sound criticism is as truly a divine revelation as Scripture itself, and we shall fail in our duty to Him who is the truth if we foreclose the question."

His Gifford Lectures need no mention here. Instead let us turn to matters less public but more vital, and some fragments of letters to his friends shall tell of them.

"The dons are feeding in Emmanuel on Tuesday week, May 12, at 8 p.m. Now therefore come thou also. Proceedings will finish with a very fine stink, for which I will commit you to learned and odoriferous hands."

"Glad to hear you have invented a Canadian girl. I am willing to believe that the animal is very charming already,

and I have no doubt that it will be still more charming when it is old enough to be more mischievous. I am just getting clear for my pestif book. . . . I have to give the Winchester ordination addresses this month. You may be edified to hear that my first counsel to the clergy is, Don't tell lies ; and the second is, Don't have a dusty Bible. . . . We have invented a new cat, now seven months old, which is very charming too, and admirably accomplished also. How old must your charming girl be to have as much sense as the cat ? It is an interesting comparison."

"I have been committing much gluttony of old Irish history, and very lively it is, though Donnybrook Fair is not quite the whole of it. The *populi bestiales Pictorum* figure largely."

"Why should I turn away from you ? You have not turned away from me. It is but common human temptation and common human sin. It is not I that am of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. . . . There, as He sits in heaven, He is flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, and every sorrow of our heart is echoed in His own ; for no temptation can assail us but He knows it altogether, for He has fought and conquered it Himself, and He can strengthen us to fight and conquer too. Yes, I know what those wakeful hours are—sometimes a downright romance of wicked bitterness. You must break it off at all costs. Get a book, or sit up for awhile if you cannot otherwise shut out evil thoughts. . . . The question from the great White Throne will not be how many sins we had, but what we did with them. If we strive, help will come in ways we least expect. . . . God give you grace to make you even more a blessing than you are to them that need your help."

The German War brought back Aeschylus' *Persians* to him "with more vivid force than when I read it (not in school) half a century ago," and he quotes lines 808ff. His last printed work was a *Letter to a Swedish Clergyman* on the War, which won high approval in all directions, and was reprinted and translated by the Foreign Office for circulation in neutral countries.

On 6th August 1916 he was knocked down by a

motor car which he had not heard. The accident was followed by a stroke on 28th September, and he died on 14th November 1916. His work was done; he was an old man—but not so old as to lose heart or faith. Here is part of a letter he wrote in August 1916:

“Some there are who doubt of love, now that hell is loosed on earth as it never was loosed before. But there is nothing new: it is only Job’s old question, and in Christ we know more than Job. He that spared not His own Son, how shall He not be guiding us all in love? Nay, more, unless Eternal Love is sovereign all thought is meaningless. What if the fair flowers of this world seem to wither in thousands before the infernal blast? Their bloom is not for threescore years and ten, but for the unfailing years of the state where time is not. As the Lord of goodness liveth, nothing that is good can perish. My own call will come soon or late, and my last years may well be years of sorrow, perhaps of loneliness or blindness, but in Christ they shall not be years of doubt or murmuring. They tell me I am naturally optimistic. I think the reverse is nearer the truth. I know the awful sternness of love divine. . . . Year by year life seems more intense, more full of thankfulness for the mercies round me, from the loving devotion of your own child to the affections of servants and the kindly offices of mere strangers. They seem like flashes of glory from the image of God behind the veil of flesh.”

“Dear, dear Lucy,” he wrote in Sept. 1916, “every year I seem to grow more hopeful and more full of thankfulness for the mercies round me.” Perhaps the lines, which he wrote long ago in a pupil’s volume of notes from his Church History lectures, may fittingly close this sketch of his teacher—in English here, though he wrote them in Greek—

“Be of good courage; I have overcome,
And I have the keys of death and of Hades.
Faithful is He that promised,
But hope that is seen is not hope.”

T. R. GLOVER.

THE SACRIFICE OF THANKFULNESS.



I.

THANKFULNESS THE TRUE SACRIFICE.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."—Rom. xii. 1.

EVEN the visions of St. John scarcely look so far into the glorious future as the Epistle to the Romans which is now before us. The verse I have read is St. Paul's conclusion from a vast review of the history of mankind from first to last. Through the hollow splendour of the world of failure round him the Apostle's keen eyes glance backward to the old sin which had been the ruin of human life, then forward to the time beyond time when there shall be no more sin and death, but the whole creation shall share in the glorious liberty of the children of God. Even the stubborn unbelief of Israel shall one day be made to help His glorious purpose of having mercy on all men. Then bursts

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out a song of triumph: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! . . . I beseech you *therefore*, brethren, by God's compassions,—by all the tender mercies he has shown to them of old, and by the mighty salvation he has raised up now for us and all men,—that ye offer your bodies, by means of which all your works are done both good and bad, as a living sacrifice,—living, and therefore holy and well-pleasing to God—for just this is the worship reasonably to be expected from men redeemed like you."

You will have noticed one striking phrase. What is a living sacrifice? Our first idea of sacrifice is the killing of victims; and in fact the Jewish temple was a great slaughter-house of sheep and oxen, and the smoke of the offerings for sin went up to heaven continually from the altar of burnt-offering. It was more like a butcher's shop than a church. But if these sacrifices for sin were the most conspicuous of the offerings, there were others also where no blood was shed. These were not offerings for sin, and could not be, for without shedding of blood is no remission; so that they were offerings of thanksgiving. Therefore a living sacrifice is a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

As everything turns on this, I will give you another proof of it. Whatever might be the meaning of the Jewish sacrifices, it came to an end when the veil of the temple was rent in twain.

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The gospel knows of only one offering for sin—the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sin of the whole world which our Lord has offered once for all. We have no altar but the cross of Christ, no sacrifice for sin but the one true sacrifice on Golgotha. Thus there are no sacrifices left for sinners like us to offer but the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving; but the Lord has made all of us priests to offer these.

It follows that the Christian life is essentially a life of thanksgiving. True, it is a sacrifice. We have to offer ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be used and consumed according to our Father's loving will. Not our way but His, whether He lift us to the throne or on the cross. Be this world's trials what they may, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. Be our sins and failures what they may, we are not to brood over them with morbid remorse, but to thank God and take courage, and go forward in the spirit of hope. Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Christian life is not the melancholy thing which men so often make it. The gifts of God are not mere traps to catch us in. "Touch not, taste not, handle not," are commandments of men, which have indeed a show of wisdom and humility, but are of no value at all to check the carnal nature. All things are ours, if we are Christ's. All things are

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given us for enjoyment, if only they are sanctified with prayer and thanksgiving. We are not called to any sort or kind of abstinence or fasting, except from murmuring and sin. Every pleasure we can find in life is freely ours, if only we can be truly thankful for it to our Heavenly Father.

Does this sound strange? Well, it is the teaching of St. Paul. There were Colossians and Ephesians in his time who thought it dangerous, and some will think so still. Must we not have laws and rules to tell us what is right and wrong, and act according to them? I answer that laws and rules have their use, but that we shall not find it out unless we set the spirit of thankfulness above them. Pharisees of all ages have tried another way of working laws and rules; and we know what it comes to. But by thankfulness I do not mean the Pharisee's thankfulness, that he is not as other men, or even as this publican. Nor do I mean the swindler's thankfulness: "Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich, and perhaps very charitable with my ill-gotten wealth." Words like these are mere selfishness, however they may sound like words of thankfulness. True thankfulness is from heaven, heavenly. It lights our souls with righteousness and peace and joy, and fills our hearts with love of God and of the sons of God for whom Christ's blood was shed.

Now consider what a guide of life this is. They know little of their own hearts or of the mind of

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Christ who look to laws and rules as their highest guide. The spirit of thankfulness is the sword of God dividing right and wrong. Laws and rules may guide our outward actions, or more likely they will not even do that; but the spirit of thankfulness is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. If you have any doubt of the matter, try it for yourself. Take something which you know to be wrong, or something which you are making believe to be right; some unfair advantage over your neighbour, or something which is doing him harm; or something which is doing yourself harm in body or soul; or, if you like, something which is perfectly innocent, except that you are too fond of it. Take one of these, and try if you can receive it as God's gift, and truly thank Him for it. You will very soon find out that thankfulness is a test which searches far beyond the reach of laws and rules. Of course it is possible for you to deal deceitfully; but if you are indeed thankful, the rest of your duty will take care of itself. How can a man be anything else than pure and true and loving so long as his heart is overflowing with thankfulness for the gift of life in Christ?

This, then, is the Christian life. It is a sacrifice as wholly devoted to God as any burnt-offering; but it is the living sacrifice of thanksgiving. This is the true communion with God. There was always something of wrath and torment in those lower sacrifices for sin which witness to our broken peace;

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but this is the sacrifice of perfect love, the sacrifice which is holy and well-pleasing to God. It is the Lord who humbled Himself to offer sacrifice for sin; and our work is to rejoice and be thankful for it evermore. Even the Jewish rabbis could rise above their beggarly elements when they said, All sacrifice has an end in the world to come, but the sacrifice of thanksgiving has no end. This is the proper sacrifice of the Church triumphant; and the meanest of us here is called of God to offer it along with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven. It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

II.

THE REVELATION IN ITSELF.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."—Rom. i. 16.

THE Apostle is looking back on his twenty years of work round Antioch and Ephesus and Corinth as so much preparation for a still more important work before him in the West. He knows that Antioch, Ephesus, and Corinth are so many stages on the way to Rome, and that the future of the world can be decided only in its capital. The first decisive step towards realizing his vision of a Christian empire is to settle the gospel in Rome. So in these bold words he introduces the imperial city to her conqueror. The gospel of Christ is a power that will do what the wisdom of the Greeks could not do, that will triumph where God's own law has failed.

Now the gospel of Christ is nothing more than the history of His life on earth. It was not the business of apostles to shape it into dogmas for the use of future generations, but simply to bear

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witness of the things which they had seen and heard, and to teach diligently all that Jesus began to do as well as to teach. But the gospel is also nothing less than the fullest meaning of this history. Scripture is only the record, the Church is no more than a witness; the revelation itself is the historic Person of the Son of God incarnate as the Son of Man. His Person, not His teaching—for it is in His Person and not in His teaching that our questions have their answer. If you aspire to know what God is like—"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." If you are content with light for your daily duty, He bids you come and learn of Him, for He was meek and lowly. Thus every question brings us straight to the historic facts of His life on earth. These facts are what we have to go upon. Everything else is contained in them, and has to be gathered from them by spiritual recognition or by reasoned argument. We recognize His goodness, and we reason of His wisdom.

The appeal to history runs through Scripture. Turn back to the first of the Ten Words which God spake on Sinai to them of old. He does not say, "I am the Infinite, the Unconditioned, or the Supreme Being"; but "I am the Lord your God, which have brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondmen," and therefore ye shall keep these Words of Mine. The deliverance from Egypt is the standing argument of the Old Testament. God so loved Israel; and the history of the

marvellous things which He did in the sight of their fathers in Egypt was a memorial of His love that could not be blotted out. "Our fathers cried to thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded; and therefore did they set their hope in God."

But days were coming when men should no longer say, "The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." It was not prophets only who spoke of a still more glorious deliverance, but the whole work of God in Israel's history was one long prophecy of better things to come. The redemption of Israel was the earnest of the redemption of mankind from a mightier enemy than the king of Egypt. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The revelation is through history from first to last; for it is history which tells us how Christ lived among men, and died for our sins and rose again from the dead. If this record is true, the highest flights of Christian hope are not unreasonable. All things are ours if we are Christ's.

Thus the gospel is essentially historical. It is neither a philosophy nor a law nor a system of worship, though sundry systems of philosophy and law and worship have grown out of it. Were it

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no more than these, it could not be a power of God unto salvation. If philosophy or law or worship were of man's invention, they could never be anything more than fluctuating opinions and partial truths about God; and even if God were to deliver them straight from heaven, neither philosophy nor law nor worship nor any combination of them could touch the springs of action in the inner life. They might search out our sin and drag it to the light, but they could never overcome the carnal nature. The gospel is not like these. It is not a growth of this world, but a revelation from the unseen. Men do not set forth in it their passing opinions about God, but God reveals in Christ His own eternal thought. In Him there is neither variableness nor shadow of turning, but the patience that endures for ages and the love that is for ever. The hesitations of philosophy, the impotences of law, and the futilities of superstition are swept away in a moment by the historic message that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. We have not the task of finding out God by searching, or of winning His favour by observances. The work is already done for us, done once for all, and done for ever; and we have only to draw near by faith and offer ourselves, our souls and bodies, as a living sacrifice—which is necessarily a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

If we believe, as we profess to believe, in a God who governs all things, without whom not a sparrow

shall fall to the ground, we must also believe that every single fact of history, however trifling it may seem to us, forms part of an infinite and eternal plan, and therefore in its relations is itself also infinite. If there is one all-ruling God, the scheme of the ages must form one organic whole, so that we should unravel the entire mystery of earth and heaven if we could only trace out any one historic fact in all its relations to the world of time and to the world where time is not. Now the Person of the Lord is not only a fact of history but visibly the central fact of history, and moreover a fact from the other world and a divine fact which touches the life of mankind and of men at every moment. He that was to come is coming still; not at the ends of the earth or to a generation that shall be born, but here and now to every one of us. We say that we look for a judgment to come, and we have no doubt it will be very terrible for the sinners it overtakes; but meanwhile we flatter ourselves that it shall not come to pass in our time, and forget that it is come already. When the light came into the world many centuries ago, the judgment came with it. It is the harlot who tells us that the Lord is gone a long journey, and will return at the time appointed. His coming is as real day by day as if we saw the heavens open, and His presence here now is nearer to us than if He stood before us in the flesh. He speaks to mankind in every fact of history, and to men in every fact of their

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own lives; and His word is very nigh to us. He that came of old is ever coming, ever calling, ever standing at the door and knocking, if it may be that we are willing to hear His voice and open to Him.

The sum of what I say is this. The gospel is a power of God unto salvation, because it is the life on earth of Him that is alive for evermore. That life is an unchanging fact, in the sense that nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken away from it; but the lights in which men see it are constantly changing. It is like the cliffs of the sea-coast, on which the shifting play of light and shade and colour never ceases all the day long. Yet again, that life is an infinite fullness. If ages untold were needed to prepare the earth for the coming of the Son of Man, we cannot suppose that a few centuries of history have exhausted its meaning. That fullness is being slowly revealed by divers portions and in divers manners to successive generations—by the facts of history to mankind generally, and by the facts of life to men personally. The revelation is a dispensation of the present as well as a fact of the past, and its interpretation to men is both universal and individual. This is the subject I hope to explain more fully next Sunday and the Sunday after, so that for the present I need say no more of it.

There is still a practical question of the greatest importance, of which different aspects may occupy us for two Sundays beyond. If the Lord is ever

calling to us, how are we to hear His voice and recognize His coming? I think we can find in the words of our text such a general answer as will be enough. The gospel, then, is a power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, but only to one that believeth. The lake of fire, whatever it may mean, is the only promise for the fearful and the unbelieving, and the rest of the men that have cast their Saviour behind their backs. But do not mistake these words, and the whole spirit of the gospel with them. Belief here is not mere opinion, however true; and if your belief is only a blameless orthodoxy, you are doing no more than the devils do. The belief which is the beginning and end of Christian conduct is a loving trust in Christ which cannot but show itself in a life to Him who died for you. Only come to Him with a willing heart, and He will not refuse His answer to the question, Who art Thou, Lord? He will draw us to Himself, and we shall know Him for ourselves, and know that we know Him. It is life that acts on life, and love that kindles love; and herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Our knowledge may be scanty, our faith weak with the sins of the past; but if only we have a willing heart, the love within will recognize the love without, and spring to meet it. But indeed the love of God is within as well as without, for it is shed abroad in our hearts by the

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Holy Ghost which is given to us, which shall fill them with righteousness and peace and joy. So neither again is the love within our very own. Our own in a sense it is, for it springs from the uttermost deeps of our nature; yet it is but the answer called out by the love of God, who raises His children from the living death of selfishness. It is the redounding wave that rolls off the break-water of human life, back into the measureless ocean of the love divine from which it came.

III.

THE REVELATION IN HISTORY.

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”—ISA. lv. 8, 9.

THE gospel of Christ is neither a philosophy nor a law nor a system of worship, but a life which is divine as well as human, revealed through life to mankind and to men. That life is complete in one sense, for the Son of Man has long ago ascended where He was before. Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more. The days of His flesh are ended, and He sitteth now at the right hand of the throne of God.

But in a higher sense the revelation is hardly yet begun. The infinite fullness of that life is what no one man or nation or age of the world can realize. Even the divine Teacher can only reveal it gradually, in an infinite variety of dealings with mankind and with men. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; yet not the same to Jew and Gentile, Greek and Roman, English and Japanese, to our

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fathers and ourselves, or even to you and the friend of your life. He is the same power of life to all that truly come to Him; yet that power is quite as much revealed as limited by a vast variety of race and country and historical and personal circumstances. The same Lord and Saviour is rich in mercy to all that call upon Him; but we see Him from an infinite variety of points of view. Great as is the difference between the subtle criticism of the Greek, the rigid legalism of the Roman, and the grave enthusiasm of the Teuton, between the Red Indian's dignified self-control and the black man's eager demonstrativeness, they are all good in their way, and each of them reveals its own side of the Infinite Life. Mere climate counts for something. The thoughts of the mountaineer are not those of the dweller in the plain; and the inspiration of the sombre sky of England is not like that of the bright blue sea of Greece and Italy. The cold North which has given the Englishman his grim energy has also chilled his imagination, so that half the difficulties he finds in his Bible are difficulties of understanding the warm, imaginative language of sunnier climates than his own.

But I wish to leave on one side to-night as far as may be the varieties of race and climate and personal character, and speak more generally of the revelation of the Life to men through history. Turning, then, to history, we see our text blazoned on every page of it, that the thoughts of God are

not like our thoughts, and our ways are not His ways. The apostles themselves who walked with Jesus were so far from understanding Him that they persisted in looking for an earthly kingdom, and strove for place in it the very night before the crucifixion; and even the enlightenment of the Spirit only just overcame their slowness to receive the mystery of the call of the Gentiles. So again in the fourth century, when the patience of the saints had at last overcome the rage of the persecutors, and a long prospect of peace and prosperity seemed to lie before the Churches, we cannot wonder if Constantine's bishops were ready to cry, "This is the kingdom of God." But even then destruction was upon them, and in a few more years the ancient world was overthrown. Pass on to the sixteenth century. Rome sat again as a queen, and said, "I shall see no sorrow." She had overcome the restless North at last, and given the flesh of her fellow-servants the heretics to something worse than the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field. She was building the dome of St. Peter's as her memorial for ever—building with the price of sin, with money that was unclean like the hire of a harlot, when Christ came suddenly and cut her in sunder, and appointed her portion with the hypocrites.

So we go on, from one generation to another, dreaming our petty dreams, of counsel forsooth to the Lord of ages. No doubt we should govern the world with a little more regard to poetic justice. Meanwhile, "The Lord is slow to anger and great

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in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked. The Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." He looketh to the ends of the earth and to the years of many generations. It is not for Pharaoh's wickedness that He sets him upon the throne of Egypt, neither is it for Israel's righteousness that He brings him out through the Red Sea. Men are good or evil as they make themselves, and thereafter God makes them vessels of mercy or vessels of wrath; but they all have their place in the great house which is of God's building, not man's.

The great house of God's building is the Church of Christ; and the Church of Christ is wider than the carnal factions which arrogate to themselves its glorious name, and circumscribe the infinite and boundless reach of mercy by shibboleths of their own invention. It is the company of angels and the Church of the first-born written in heaven; and many a Samaritan heretic and many a Roman centurion shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down in it with patriarchs and prophets and saints before the Judge of all. Its foundations were laid before the world began, and now it is building stone by stone. And every stone of it is a living stone, a life redeemed by Christ, a heart which has throbbed with hope and fear and passion like your own, a soul which the Saviour found wandering, and gathered with His arm, and laid in His bosom, and brought home to the Father of all.

We have no need to envy the men who saw the face of Christ with the eyes of sense, and heard His gracious words with their outward ears. They were not the better for knowing Him after the flesh, neither are we the worse for knowing Him after the spirit. It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing, though it were the flesh of Christ. It is but the text from which His spirit preaches to successive generations, and His teaching is the unfolding of the mystery of the ages with a clearness that increases as the centuries lengthen that separate us from the carnal presence of our Lord. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." We can often read something of it in the light of history. What, then, did the Spirit say to the church of Israel, the church of Pharisees and Sadducees, of Gamaliel and of Ananias the whited wall? That the Gentiles were their brethren in Christ, and that Israel itself would gain by their admission a better liberty than any that Barabbas or Judas of Galilee could offer. They would not listen; and therefore the Romans came and took away their place and nation. What did He say to the Romans themselves in the fourth century? That the barbarians were their brethren in Christ, and partakers with them of His promise. They would not listen; and therefore these same barbarians came in like a flood and overthrew the Roman Empire. What was His message to the Latin Church of the sixteenth century? That the nations of

northern Europe were their brethren in Christ, and no longer needed to be kept in leading strings by a visible catholic Church of Latin sectarianism. They would not listen; and therefore Europe was rent in sunder to this day, and the leadership of Christian thought was shifted to the North. And now what does the Spirit say to modern England? We need no prophet among us to read some of the writing on the wall. That the outcasts of England are our brethren in Christ, and the victims of our social system are children of God as well as we. We have cared far too much for this world's wealth and this world's fashions, and even the good gifts of culture and learning have too often helped to puff up our pride. It is not enough to offer them charity, or justice, or political rights. Nothing will suffice but a welcome in Christ which the man of the world will never give; and nothing short of this will heal the discords of the State and avert the war of classes which darkens the horizon of the whole civilized world. So much of the Spirit's message we can safely read by the light of Scripture and history, and the rest will be revealed to us in due time, if we are willing to receive it.

So may it be. God grant that England may listen to His voice more willingly than Israel and Rome. Yet when we turn to history, we find that God seems to reveal Himself to nations chiefly in their trouble and distress. His way is in the whirlwind and in the storm. Even in shakings of earth and

heaven He is working salvation for His people, that another generation may praise Him for His marvellous works. The destruction of Jerusalem cleared an open space for the growth of the Gentile churches; and from the fall of the Roman Empire rose the new society of Europe with its rich developments of thought and life. And if an age of wars and tumults is before us now—if some war of giants breaks out, as it well may, from the armed peace around us, or if some strife of classes or upheaval of anarchy should shake our civilization to its foundations—we know that God will bring out of our affliction some new and better order of things.

But why is this? Why should God reveal Himself so much in storms and troubles, when we know that He doth not afflict willingly the sons of men? Look to history again, and see. It is on a stubborn and rebellious generation that the affliction comes. If men prefer their sin to the Spirit's teaching, that sin will find them out. They are quite free to disobey if they like. The hatreds they cherish cannot fail to bring their own punishment. Meanwhile God gets His work done whether we are willing to be labourers with Him or not; and if we refuse, the loss is ours. If the Jews of our Lord's time had been willing to put away their hatred of the Gentile, Jerusalem need not have been destroyed. Had the Romans chosen to overcome their scorn of the barbarian, he would have been proud to serve their glorious Empire. So too, if we refuse to lay

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aside our pride and lose our class divisions and our party hatreds in the love of Christ, England also will have to go the way of Israel and Rome, for there is no respect of persons with God.

These may not be in the technical sense church matters; but they belong to the revelation of Christ in history, of which I am speaking. That revelation is wider than any sects of ours, whether Roman or English, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, wider than the whole compass of the visible Church on earth. As it is not all light within that Church, neither is it all darkness beyond. Christ is the light of the world. He is the true light that never ceases to come into the world and be the light of every man. If we believe that all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works proceed from God, we must also believe that Christ reveals Himself through them to many a man who never heard His name. And if the revelation is not limited to the visible Church, neither does it come only through that Church. If the Church is holy because it is ordained of God, the State is holy too. There are sinners enough in both, and both are holy nevertheless, and in their several ways true revelations of Christ our Lord.

Once more, the thoughts of God are not our thoughts, neither are our ways His ways. Our systems are like the stately icebergs that plough their way for awhile through the sea, glittering with rainbow colours in the sunshine. But the waters pour down their sides in cold cascades, and soon

they shall vanish away, and the face of the deep shall know them no more. The thoughts of God are infinite and changeless as the azure sky. The covenant of the Lord is from everlasting, and His counsel shall endure for ever. It is He that rules the tossing sea of this world's wickedness, and causes the Pharaohs and Sennacheribs to do His will, and accomplish the thing He would have done, and to sum up not all men only but all things in Christ, from whom they came, in whom they consist, and to whom they are moving as their final end. And His will is to have mercy on all men.

May He of His infinite mercy strengthen *us* to hear His voice and serve His will in our own generation, in that state to which He shall call us in His holy Church and in His holy commonwealth of England.

IV.

THE REVELATION IN LIFE.

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."—ROM. viii. 28.

IT is a very old complaint, that the ways of God are not equal. Virtue is not always rewarded, nor vice always punished; and altogether the ways of God in this world show much disregard for poetic justice. Eliphaz the Temanite only misleads us with his argument that the sufferings of Job are clear proof that he must have been an unusually cunning hypocrite; and even the Psalmist does not help us much with his idea that God sets the wicked in slippery places and casts them down, that they may suddenly consume, perish, and come to a fearful end. Sometimes they do; but again sometimes they evidently do not. Neither can we safely throw in remorse of conscience as a makeweight for the misfortunes which ought to befall them and do not; for remorse of conscience is precisely what the worst men often do not seem to feel. Even if we add in the consideration that there may be a very different arrangement of rewards and punishments in another

life, we do not quite clear the difficulty of their inequality in this life.

Upon the whole, though the facts of life agree to some extent with our ideas of poetic justice, they are very far from completely doing so. It follows that God is working by some other rule than that of giving every man the share of this world's good things which he earns by his merits. Let us try what help St. Paul can give us on the question. His view is of the very widest, for his Epistle to the Romans covers the whole range of history, and this eighth chapter seems to look into the future farther than anything in St. John's writings. At the end of his glorious vision of deliverance, not for the elect only or even for mankind, but for the entire creation, he turns to the sufferings of the saints. Now no man can accuse St. Paul of blindness to the sufferings of this present time. He speaks of the groans of the entire creation, of the children of God, and even of the Holy Spirit in them, and then he goes on: "We know," says he. Mark his positiveness. The word he uses means not that we get it as a reasonable inference from things we see, but that we know it with the absolute and final certainty of spiritual knowledge. We know then, as surely as we know that truth is right and malice wrong, that with them that love God all things work together for good. It is not with each other that they work together, but with such men. If we take another reading, it is God that worketh all things together with them that

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love Him; and in this case men are fellow-workers with God in the great deliverance. But whatever way we take it, the verse cannot mean less than that whoso loveth God, all things shall conspire to help him on for good. It is a hard saying in the face of wrong and outrage, want and misery; yet thus *we know* it is. It is a hard saying, when we hear the very children cry for pain before they can know what good and evil mean; harder still when the mind that is clouded with sickness is the mind of a servant of God: yet thus *we know* it is. However great be the ruins which sin has made, *we know* that Christ will build them up again. We see but a fragment of the mighty scheme of love which stretches on from the far past when there was no life yet to the far future when there shall be no more death: and even that fragment we can only see darkly through the mists of sin. Had we but eyes to see, we should see that earth is just as full of glory as heaven. Had we but ears to hear, we should hear our Saviour ever calling to us. We complain that Christ is far off, and every trouble makes us doubt His presence with us, when in truth He is speaking to us in changing tones through all the changing facts of life, and most of all reveals Himself through the clouds of suffering and sorrow.

Let us trace the life of a commonplace man, to show something of the vast variety of the facts through which Christ reveals Himself to him. He is born, then, into some sort of a home, where he stands in definite relations of obedience to father and mother,

and affection to brothers and sisters. At school he owes a new form of obedience to teachers, and forms new friendships with other boys. As he grows up, the obedience he owes at home relaxes, while the reverence remains. Presently he enters on the business of life, whatever it is, and becomes a part of the complicated machine we call the State. Thenceforth he lives in all sorts of relations with all sorts of people above and below him, or on a level with him. Then perhaps he forms in marriage an entirely new relation, which brings him into a new circle of connexions. Then come children to teach him the other side of the old home where he was once himself a child. Meanwhile the ardour of youth passes into the measured strength of middle life, and that again into the ripe experience of age. With declining strength new trials come. Sickness interrupts his work, the friends of his youth pass away, and bereavement clouds his life, till at last he can do no more than wait for his change.

It is a very ordinary life that I have traced. I have not spoken of the few who have adventures or rise to eminence, but of the thousands who meet you in the street, who are never heard of beyond a narrow circle, and seem to leave no memory behind. The utmost which the world remembers of them is that they lived so many years, and begat sons and daughters, and died—like the patriarchs before the Flood. Yet what an infinite variety there is even in such a humdrum life as this. We complain that

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our lives are monotonous, when the obscurest life is full of changes. No two days are the same to any of us; much less are any two lives alike. We may see little difference in the hundreds of hands employed in some great factory, but God knows each of them separately as the shepherd knows his sheep, and deals with each of them differently from the rest.

More than this, the obscurest life is full of meaning—for another world, if not for this. It is at least a life for which Christ died; and now that He liveth, can we doubt that He is ever watching over it with loving care and patience? He will not forget His own, or overlook them in the multitude of others. Here, then, is a reason that we can see for the infinite variety of life through which He speaks to different men, and to the same man at different times. We notice in His life on earth the unfailing tact and delicate sympathy with which He varies His treatment of the various people who come in His way. He has one discourse for Jairus, and another for the Roman centurion; one for Mary of Magdala, and another for Mary of Bethany. Will He not be the same in heaven, guiding each of us with the training suited to his case? If so, it is not to be expected that the eyes of mortals, and those sinners, should always see its fitness. They may think they see its unfitness for this world; but how can they possibly judge of its fitness for another?

Yet again, that other world is not a confused multitude, but an ordered kingdom where every soul

redeemed by Christ shall have its proper place and duty in the royal service. The order of Church or State on earth is a true likeness of the perfect Church and State hereafter. So the work of Christ is not simply to deliver mankind in general from sin, but to prepare each individual man for the work that shall be given him in another life. Here again we see that complexity of aim requires a further complexity of means.

Yet further, His work is not to be done by force. God pleads with all men, but none does He compel. In the day that He created man, He gave him freedom, in the sense that he is always free to go his own evil way if he chooses. The gifts of God are without repentance, and He will never overbear that freedom. We cannot imagine the wicked man dragged by force to heaven and forced to see the face of Him that sitteth on the throne. The love of Christ constraineth us, no doubt, but only with the cords of love, for with no other does He care to draw us unto Him. He pleads with us continually by His mercies in the past and by His patience in the present; but He will never force unwilling hearts. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

Life itself is the revelation of Christ; and in this is its infinite worth, for thus it is that every act of this life is fraught with meaning for another. It is hard for us to see what revelation of Christ there is in lives that seem condemned to vice and misery by

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the sins of others rather than their own, though there is some help in knowing that much shall be required only of him to whom much is given. But it is more than hard—it is impossible to realize a revelation to ourselves as long as we are cherishing sin. We only feel our peace destroyed and our life degraded, for we shall not find out more by yielding to sin. It is only in resistance to sin that we begin to see the evil it is doing. Meanwhile Christ is ever calling to us, and every work we do in Him is a glimpse of heaven. If we are only willing to follow the revelation of Christ in common life, we shall find in it a power that can ennoble toil and comfort sorrow and transfigure pain. It is the light of heaven shining on every petty trifle of our daily work, that fills our hearts with joy.

But we must see that we do follow the revelation of Christ, and not a gospel of our own. We must sit like Mary at the Master's feet, and listen as children listen for His words. We have all of us got some clever words of our own that will have to be set aside. We know so much better than God knows what is good for us, I suppose. Nay rather, let us walk humbly with our God, and receive both good and evil from Him, and reverently bless His holy name for all. If we love Him we shall see the daily round of life reveal Him, and all things shall work together with us for good.

They are triflers who tell us that life is a stage play; yet they speak more truth than they know

The stage is a world we cannot see, the actors are the sons of God for whom Christ's blood was shed, the spectators are the Church triumphant of angels and men, and the whole scene of our trial is bright with the light of a sky that needs neither sun nor moon to shine in it, for it is the glory of God that lightens it and the Lamb is the light thereof.

V.

THE REVELATION AND THE INNER LIFE.

"As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me."—JOHN vi. 57.

I SHALL not need to give you any very close analysis of our Lord's discourse at Capernaum, or of the steps by which He leads His hearers up from the loaves and fishes to the bread that came down from heaven, and so to the culminating revelation of life contained in our text. It will be enough for our purpose if we put together a few verses to show its general meaning.

Ver. 35. "He that *cometh* to me shall never hunger; and he that *believeth* on me shall never thirst."

Ver. 40. "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one that *seeth* the Son, and *believeth* on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

Ver. 44. "No man can *come* to me, except the Father draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day."

Ver. 47. "He that *believeth* on me hath everlasting life."

Ver. 54. "Whoso *eateth* my flesh, and *drinketh* my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Now though it is plain that these words have a good deal to do with the Lord's Supper, it is equally plain that our Lord is not directly speaking of the future sacrament. Were He doing so, He could not possibly have expected even His disciples to understand Him; and in any case His language far transcends all ordinances whatever. Is it not clear that coming and believing and eating and drinking are very much the same thing? This is a teaching which underlies not only the Lord's Supper but all spiritual life whatsoever—that even as natural life must take and feed on bread, so spiritual life must take and feed on Christ. He is putting here in words what the Lord's Supper represents in a sign; and when the Jews try to fix an absurd meaning on them, He turns them round every way to show that He means them spiritually. It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing. Not in His holy Supper only, but in every work or word or thought which men do or say or think by faith, He draws near to them and they draw near to Him.

I say *by faith*, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. Now the faith which fills your Bible—the word is found two hundred times in the New Testament, the thing much oftener—is plainly something more than belief. There is no faith in the sinner's belief that vice is bad for his health, and there need not be any in the

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Christian's belief that his creed is true. Belief is not faith till it is quickened by something (no matter what for the present) which turns it into action. Scripture acknowledges nothing as faith unless it shows itself in action, and records no action as good unless it is done by faith. In truth, we all live by faith, whatever we may say; for it is only by faith that we can get one step beyond the things we see. Faith is the mainspring even of common life. We all believe in the laws of nature; and we act on our belief, and venture our lives from moment to moment on the unseen; and this is faith. The child believes that his father will give him good gifts and not evil, and acts on his belief; and this again is faith. The old Romans believed that the good of the State was better than their own lives, and acted on their belief; and this again was faith. The companions of Mahomet believed that a righteous God had sent them to destroy the idols of the Christians, and acted on their belief; and this again was faith. Many a man that walks in darkness believes that conscience and truth are things of a higher order than interest or pleasure, and acts on his belief; and this again is faith. So we rise from faith which is hardly more than instinct to faith which sees only a glimmer of light in the darkness, and so still upward from faith to faith, like the stair

“That scaled by steps of gold to heaven gate,”

till we reach the man who believes that Christ is

ever speaking to him in the dull round of common duty and acts on his belief, and finds his life on earth radiant with the joy of heaven.

Thus we see that action rather than belief is the sphere of faith. Nothing can be falser than the idea that faith is the assent to things not proved, the evidence of things not true to reason, as if it were somehow meritorious to believe absurdities. Faith deals with the unseen, not with the unreasonable; and reason is quite able to judge of the unseen when once it is revealed. But reason must take account of all the evidence. Whatever be the purely historical case for the central fact of our Lord's resurrection—and I think few events are so well attested—it ought to be confirmed by the testimony of many generations that the flesh of Christ is meat indeed, and also by the echo of His love that comes unbidden from our own hearts. These three should form a threefold cord; but reason must judge of all. Even our Lord constantly appealed to reason by signs and works which none other man did. He does not ask us to believe Him against reason: only He bids us to judge righteous judgment, and to act on it with unflinching courage and unsleeping watchfulness.

Here is the difficulty. We are all beset with trials, from the youngest child who suffers ridicule for Christ to the ancient invalid who can scarcely move his lips to bless his Saviour. Life is a conflict where many a time strength is helpless and wisdom without power, and the heart of the natural man

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grows faint. Mere belief may do pretty well for fair weather, but it is swept away in a moment by the storms of passion. It is a cockboat in the hurricane, a cobweb on the strong man's limbs. But faith is belief that is quickened by love, and therefore endued with power from on high. The gospel is a power of God unto salvation because it is not a string of dogmas, but the life of a man like ourselves, a man whom we can learn to know and to love and trust and worship as our ever-living and ever-present Saviour, our Lord and our God.

Yet once more, faith is not the belief of the reason, however clear it be, but the firm grasp of the whole man with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his mind. "Have faith in God" is the first and great commandment. It is useless to take our creed from other men, for no truth can do us any good till we have taken it and eaten it and made it a portion of our very self; and this we cannot do without a resolute and strenuous effort which calls into action and keeps on the strain every power of our nature. And is not this—forget the gospel for a moment—is not this the noblest idea we can form of life? Yet it is within the reach of all of us. Listen to the secret of it. "As the living Father sent me, and I live by my devotion to the Father; so he that eateth me by faith, he also shall live by his devotion to me." Only give yourself in full and loving trust to Him who gave His earthly life for you, and He will give you of the heavenly life that He has won

for you. It is your love He wants, not your tale of bricks; and the secret of life is the same for you as it was for Him. Not by might, nor by power, nor yet by wisdom, but by loving obedience and complete devotion to Him shall you win for your incorruptible crown the unfading wreath of everlasting life.

To you I chiefly speak, you younger men and women before whom the warfare of the future lies. Your elastic strength is given you for a purpose. You little know the curious and solemn interest with which we in middle life look on the unfolding thoughts of those whom God is training to take our places in the battle. We can see that He has done great things in our time, and we know that He will do still greater things in yours. It is not for nothing that He has given the stars of heaven and the dust of the earth to our scrutiny, and shown us of His wonders in the buried past. It is not for nothing that He has stirred the dry bones of nations that were dead for ages, and filled our hearts with questionings and aspirations whose depth and height we are helpless to measure. It is not for nothing that the majestic river of human life is forcing its way with the speed of a torrent down towards an ocean whose shores are untrodden of mortals, though faith has many a vision of its glassy deeps and sunlit strand. By these signs we know that some mystery of God is unfolding, as wonderful as the call of the Gentiles, and as hard for the carnal man to receive.

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The old landmarks are vanishing which our fathers have set in Church and State; and no mere power of the sword can check any longer the divisions of nation set against nation, and class against class, and man against his fellow-man. From east and west we hear the multitudinous voice of expectation as the sound of many waters; yet men's hearts are trembling in half-unconscious waiting for some great message from the gathering darkness of the whirlwind and the storm in which the Lord our God reveals Himself.

Blessed are they that shall be found true soldiers of Christ in the warfare that is opening on us, whose end the youngest of us may not live to see. If we have harder work than our fathers had to do, we also have helps unknown to them, and the old armour of God is with us still. The old shield of faith is ours, and the old sword of the Spirit which has been tried in a thousand conflicts. Through our failures we have learned that God is with us as He was with our fathers, and by our victories we know that He will be with you as He is with us. Fear not, for Christ has overcome already. Only be strong and very courageous, and He will never leave you or forsake you.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile."

VI.

CHRISTIAN MOTIVE.

"The love of Christ constraineth us."—2 Cor. v. 14.

WHAT ought to be our motive in life? Why should we live in one way rather than another? It is an old question, debated from the most ancient times; and with one exception, the answers are exactly what they were two thousand years ago.

One man will say that pleasure is the only right motive, and indeed the only possible motive for a man in his right mind, for nobody gives up a pleasure except for the hope of a greater pleasure. This by the way is not quite true; but let it pass for the moment. Now I should not like to call this answer altogether bad, for a good deal depends on the sort of pleasure he seeks. It may be gross. "If I find pleasure in getting drunk, why should I not get drunk?" But there are evident inconveniences in getting drunk, so that a very bad man will often be quite sober. A better sort of man will seek a better sort of pleasure, and may be very refined and cultured; and if he rises to the belief that a little human

kindness is the best pleasure of all, he may forget his selfishness, and be not only a pleasanter man but actually a better man than one who goes by his duty—and forgets charity.

In general, however, the man who strives to do his duty is better than one who seeks for pleasure. He is at any rate quite clear that there is such a thing as duty, whether we like it or not. This man also varies a good deal. His idea of duty may be high or low. He may be a mere Pharisee, no doubt with a zeal for God, but with a greater zeal for cursing his neighbours. Or he may be like the emperor Marcus, the noblest of ancient heathens, a man who answered in every fibre of his being to the call of duty, rigid and severe to himself alone, gracious and kindly to all others—except the Christians. But if the path of duty is a lofty one, it is terribly hard. Few there be that find it, and fewer still that turn not out of the way. And the reason is plain. Duty can say no more than “Thou shalt,” or “Thou shalt not”: it is only a law, and law is utterly powerless to touch the heart of man, though God Himself should speak it from the cliffs of Sinai.

This, then, was the question in debate when Christ our Master came; and the two chief answers were the same then as they are now. Some said that pleasure is the right motive, and some said duty. But what did Christ Himself say? I think He said that there was truth in both, but set them both aside for something better. On the one hand, “I came that

they might have life, and have it in abundance"—and surely pleasure is an essential part of any life worth living. "For with thee is the fullness of joy, and at thy right hand is pleasure for evermore." And yet the prophets themselves never spoke of righteousness with more terrible sternness than the man who said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away." But we must go back to the very simplest message of the gospel if we want His own answer to the question.

St. John puts that message in four words: "*So* God loved the world." The objection alike to pleasure and to duty as motives of action is that in different ways they tend to make us think that God is a hard man—and every dangerous heresy can be packed into that saying of the wicked servant. If we cannot get our pleasure, or if we find our duty hard, straightway the natural man cries out that God is unreasonable; and if you look to the bottom of any sort of unsound religion, you will always find this same self-righteous grumble, that God's ways are not equal.

Earth is just as full as heaven of His glory, but unthankful men will never see it. On a world of hearts darkened by unthankfulness comes the message of love, like a burst of sunlight: "If God spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Forgiveness is not some hard-won prize to be awarded some day from the great white throne: it is the gift of life eternal here and now. It is not the far-off

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goal of toil, but the gracious gift with which we start our Christian life. It is an eternal fact of the eternal world, once for all made manifest on earth by Him who died for us, yea rather is risen again and sitteth at the right hand of the majesty on high. With His own blood He loosed us from our sins and made us kings and priests, for not unto angels but to us did He subject a mightier empire than that of Rome, even the infinite and boundless empire of the world to come.

Here, then, we reach firm ground at last. It is not pleasure that we seek, though we have gladness and everlasting joy. It is not our duty that we strive to do, though there is no condemnation in this world or another for them that are in Christ. It is the love of Christ constraineth us. Here, then, is Christ our Master's answer: "As I loved you, that ye love one another"—and "*as I loved you*" takes for granted "*because I loved you*"—"that as one man died for all, so they that live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again." We walk no more the selfish road of pleasure, for we love the image of God in our fellow-men; nor yet the rugged path of duty, for love is the fulfilment of all law.

It is the mighty love of Christ constraineth us, and we can do no other. He gave Himself for us that we should live to Him, and be thankful. Only be thankful in your inmost being, and your duty will take care of itself. As Augustine said, "Love, and do

what you please." This is the perfect freedom of the service of God. True, this love of ours may seem a frail and mortal thing, stained with sin and cramped by doubt and carnal fear, and shamed by many a fall ; but God counts us, and justly counts us, not as what we are, but as what we are striving to be. After all, our love is eternal because it is not our own : it is Christ's love shed abroad in our hearts. It is the spring of water leaping up to everlasting life. Generations of men shall pass away, the immemorial trees of the forest shall decay, but ages hence the fountain shall still be leaping up and flashing in the sunlight. Even so is everyone that loves his Saviour. The flesh is weak ; but if the spirit is willing, he too shall reach the adoring rapture of the great confession, " My Lord and my God."

VII.

“I CAME TO CALL.”

“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”—MATT. ix. 13.

“Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin : but now ye say, We see ; therefore your sin remaineth.”—JOHN ix. 41.

THIS is a thought which must have been very much in our Saviour's mind, for we find it several times repeated in different forms. It comes out most plainly at the feast in Matthew's house, when the Pharisees complain to His disciples, “Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners?” The answer is : “They that are well do not want the doctor, but they that are sick.” Another time He tells us that joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance. Yet again He spoke an unpleasant parable about certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. It is the same thought again in St. John, though the words are entirely different : “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin : but now ye say, We see ; therefore your sin remaineth.”

In fact, our Lord mixes little with the Pharisees, but goes in and out freely among publicans and sinners. He accepts Matthew's invitation, invites himself to Zacchæus, and dismisses with an emphatic blessing the woman that was a sinner. The only person who ever overcame the Lord in argument was a heathen woman. But now, where is the difference? The Pharisee was a sinner too, and none the less a sinner for all his righteousness. The answer is that the sins which shock us are rather surface matters. True, an evil heart will show itself in sins; but we cannot sin a particular sin unless a particular temptation comes in our way. The greatest of thieves cannot steal what is out of his reach, and the man who cannot write will not be a forger. After all, we are all sinners, and so far there is little to choose between the best and the worst of us. We have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

The difference of good and bad is not that the bad man commits open sins—which means that the sinner is the man who is found out. The difference is that some love their sin and cleave to it, while others hate it and renounce it. Now the sinners whom Jesus loves are always ready to turn away from sin. Matthew obeys the call to follow Him who knew no sin, Zacchæus hates even a thought of covetousness, and the woman that was a sinner has done with her sin for ever. So, too, the publican in the parable, for his confession of sin before God is itself a prayer to

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be delivered from it. So too of ourselves. The question of the Last Day will not be how many sins we did, but what we did with our sin; and when the books are opened, we shall find in them not a catalogue of all the sins we did, but the simple record that we loved our sin or hated it. What God hates is not simply sin, but the love of sin; and this is why the Saviour cared so much about sin, and so little about sins. He that hateth his own sin is passed from death unto life; and he that loveth sin, his sin remaineth.

Now we turn from the sinner to the Pharisee. He was a righteous man if ever a man was righteous, for no man ever strove more painfully to keep the laws of God. If it was not his delight, it was at all events his occupation. He gave alms abundantly, made long prayers, fasted twice in the week, and took care not to forget the mint and anise and cummin. And he was not ashamed of his religion. If he prayed, he did not care who saw him; and if he had alms to distribute, he naturally gave public notice. What more could you wish? Is not this a pattern of piety in all ages? Yet our Lord sweeps it all away as worthless and worse than worthless. Some said then, and some say now, that our Lord was unreasonable, and ought to have had more charity. But look at the common sense of the matter. Ceremonies and observances are no helps to holiness when there are too many of them. They not only distract us from the weightier matters of justice and mercy, but make

us like the Pharisee in a still more fatal way. His condemnation is not that he was a sinner like other men, or even that he did not know it, but that he did not want to know it. He was thoroughly satisfied with himself, and saw no need of a saviour, except for his neighbours. He was not blind: he sinned against light, and there was no truth in him. And untruth is that which stirs the Lord to anger. On the cross He could pray for murderers; but when they will not answer His question, “How then doth David in spirit call him Lord?” He turns in fierce anger from men who were confounded and not ashamed, and delivers to the multitude the most terrible denunciation of sevenfold woe that ever came from human lips. All sins shall be forgiven but sin against the Holy Spirit’s gentle pleading for truth; and the Pharisees were making straight for that sin.

Do not flatter yourselves that the Pharisee is dead and buried long ago. You may see him any day in church, as well pleased with himself as ever he was in the synagogue; and in Christ our Master’s judgment, he is the worst of all the sinners, having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. Now look to your own heart, and make sure that you are not a Pharisee yourself. If you find nothing very wrong in it, know of a surety that everything is wrong. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord: and it is idle to speak of holiness if you do not want to see your sin in its sinfulness.

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There is no blessing but for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, no religion worth anything at all which does not begin with the old prayer of the publican: "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner."

VIII.

JOY AND SORROW.

“Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”—Ps. xxx. 5.

JOY and sorrow lie very near together, and the change is quick from one to the other. The downcast face flashes up in a moment with joy, and the boisterous joy of a moment ago is quenched in deep depression. It is like the shifting cloud and sunshine of a summer day. But our text goes further than this :

“His wrath is only for a moment,
His favour for a lifetime :
Sorrow may come to stay the night ;
In the morning comes a shout of joy.”

Who of us is not familiar with this picture ? We lie down at night in sorrow, brooding over our troubles and exaggerating the possibilities of further troubles till they loom up before us like the spectres of a dream, always changing, and always terrible. And it is not the worst sorrows which trouble us most : it is rather the lesser ones that we magnify beyond all reason. At last we fall asleep in spite of ourselves ;

and when we wake, all is changed. The terrible spectre sinks to a very ordinary size by daylight. Perhaps the thing we feared worst looks ridiculous, now that we can think it over soberly; or possibly some fresh news comes to us like a flash of sunlight. Anyway, we are ready to shout for joy, that we are rid of the nightmare that oppressed us.

The sorrow that God sends is like the sorrow of a night. It is real, and may be hard to bear, for it was fitting that even Christ our Master should be made perfect by sufferings: yet the worst of it is of our own making and our own imagination, *μὴ περιμῶτε εἰς τὴν αὔριον*. It is not the real sorrows of life that overcome us, for He never suffers us to be tempted above what we are able to bear; but we lose ourselves in the mists of doubt and carnal fear which make them look so much greater than they really are. As soon as we get out of these—and nothing gets us out of them so well as some bit of human kindness done to others—then we see in a moment that the bright sun of God's eternal sky was shining on us all the time that we were murmuring against Him.

Now the point I want to bring you to is that joy and sorrow would not change so quickly from one to the other if they were not more nearly connected than the natural man thinks. The truth is, they never come separately. God never sends the one without an undertone of the other. Mere joy is not for sinners, and mere sorrow is what the Lord of

mercy will not send upon His creatures. The natural man is eager to drink his cup of happiness unmixed, and refuses the drop of bitterness that is needed to give it flavour; and if sorrow comes to him he rebels, because he will not see that every sorrow brings to the willing heart something better than the mere happiness for which he sells himself in this life and the other.

Look first at joy. There neither is nor can be joy without a touch of sorrow in it; and we miss the true joy if we try to take it alone. Take the joys of sense, of wealth, of ambition, even of knowledge. All these have their pains, and all are base and disappointing unless they lead up to the true joy of life, the joy of human love and kindness. This I grant is joy of the right sort, pure and well-pleasing to the God of love; but it never comes alone. The truer it is, the deeper is our sense of the sin which debases it and the weakness that limits it. However deep our yearnings over the sick and dying, ours are not the sinless eyes that had power to heal the sick and raise the dead. The better the man, the more he feels his weakness and sin. The Pharisee is well pleased with himself, and thanks God that he is not as other men: it is the saint, and the saint in his loftiest joy, who feels most keenly that however human love and kindness may image the love of God and lead up to it, still nothing but an infinite love can finally satisfy the infinite nature of a child of God. "Thou hast made us for

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thyself, O God, and our heart is restless till it rest in thee."

So, too, sorrow is never the pure and simple trouble the natural man takes it for. The Lord doth not afflict willingly the sons of men. His love must underlie the sorrow, and His mercy shine above it, if we will only lift up our hearts to the Lord and see it. If God is love, so must it be. It is along with them that love Him that He worketh all things for good. We are labourers together with God; and in the work of God the sorrowful and the afflicted may take the noblest part of all. They may seem only receivers of human love and kindness; but there is something wrong with them if they are not givers also. If they cannot give in one way, they can in another; and thrice blessed that way will be. But they cannot give what is not in them; and that which is in them must be the love of Christ shed abroad in their hearts. There is no sorrow or affliction which does not bring with it new gifts of the love of Christ, no sorrow or affliction which has not its undertone of triumph over it in Christ who loves us. "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

IX.

IMMANENCE.

"In him we live, and move, and have our being."—Acts xvii. 28.

WE have lately had so much wise and foolish talk about the immanence of God that we may do well this evening to ask what the doctrine really means, in what sense it is true, and how far it will bear the main stress of Christian thought.

Historically the doctrine is partly a reaction from the so-called carpenter theory of the eighteenth century, which represented God as a great Engineer who made the world and gave it laws and left it to itself, except that every now and then He upset His laws by a miracle. Now the witness of Science is clear, that this cannot be. If God works at all in Nature, He must work always. The doctrine, then, of God's immanence means first that the laws of Nature are the thoughts of God, and the commonest of her growths are as directly works of God as the mightiest

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of her marvels. It is a return to the old Hebrew way of thinking:

“Who maketh winds his messengers,
Flames of fire his ministers.
The mountains rise, the valleys sink,
To the place which thou hast founded for them.”

But I think the doctrine is even more closely connected with the growth of common human feeling. In the eighteenth century persons of quality stood apart from the common people, students of the classics despised other languages, and Christians looked on heathenism as pure and simple falsehood. But we have learned now that the poor have much the same feelings—and indeed much the same failings—as the rich, that barbarian languages may have expressive idioms and noble literatures, and that even the benighted heathen can sometimes show his knowledge of God in works of truth and mercy that are a shame to Christian men. So the teaching of history has compelled us to confess that all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works must proceed from God, wheresoever we may find them; and this is a second meaning of the immanence of God. As He works in all Nature, so He works in all mankind.

Immanence is a new name for the old attribute of omnipresence; but it is omnipresence in the new light of science and history. Omnipresence means that as we are present here and now, so God is present everywhere and always. But the presence of a person means action, if it means anything at all.

If God merely filled space as the air fills it, the fact would have nothing to do with religion. What we mean is that as we can act here and now, so God can act everywhere and always. Space and time are no such hindrances to Him as they are to us. So much our fathers might have told us ; but now by the light of science we see that if He works at all, He must be working everywhere and always ; and by the light of history we must confess that if He is working in ourselves for good, He must be working everywhere and always for good.

It is the old song of the Psalmist : "The Lord is loving unto every man, and his mercy is over all his works." It is the old assurance of the Lord Himself, that the bread of God is that which is ever coming down from heaven, and ever giving life to the world. "I am he that is, and was, and cometh evermore"—the final truth of the world that now is, the eternal was of the world where time is not, and in His comings the ever-living link between them. If God speaks to us at all, He must as truly speak in the gentlest winds as in the storm and the earthquake, by the fireside as at His holy table, in the petty trials of life as in the rise and fall of kingdoms. We may fancy that we hear Him better in the time of tribulation and in the hour of death ; but He is faithful who is calling, ever calling to us to come up hither and see His glory.

So far, then, as the doctrine of God's immanence gives us a more real and vivid sense of His nearness

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and constant pleading with us, it is altogether true and excellent. That sense is still greatly dulled by the ancient misbelief of Western Christendom, that God speaks only through a Church or a Book. There can be no worthy idea of God while His grace is bounded by baptism or election, His mighty working shut up in miracles, His presence adjourned to some future day of judgment. There are real differences of Christian and heathen, catholic and heretic, Church and State, Bible and common books, miracle and common works, holy things and common things; but the men who make them the difference of sacred and profane forget that the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. Earth is just as full as heaven of His glory, and there is nothing in it common or unclean but our own sin.

All this is true and needful; yet it is easy to make the immanence of God a deadly falsehood by remembering the immanence, and forgetting that it is the immanence of a God who wills and loves. There is no salvation in an impersonal influence, however fully it may pervade the universe. Let no man deceive you with words about God and His goodness, when he does not mean a God who wills and loves. Without a God who wills there is no escape from the iron yoke of a meaningless Necessity which makes all ideas of right and wrong absurd; and without a God who loves there can be neither truth nor meaning in the great historic facts which are the assurance of that love. The one mistake destroys the possibility

of the gospel, the other the substance of it, and they are both involved in any doctrine of immanence which forgets that though God lives and moves in the world, He has not His being in the world.

A merely transcendent God could stand in no living relation to us, while a merely immanent God is no God at all. We could not love the one, though we might crouch down before Him; and we could only make-believe we loved the other, though we might talk much nonsense about Him. But in Christ we know, and only when we are in Christ we know for certain, that God is neither law nor wisdom nor power, but light and love and life. We know it now by faith; and faith is not believing truth like the devils, but doing truth with all the strength of heart and soul and mind. It is the effort to know God which itself is life eternal here on earth. No blind Fate, no ruthless Law, but in Him we live and move and have our being; and in Christ we know it not with the dim perception we have of earthly things, but with the absolute and final certainty that belongs only to the things of the Spirit of God. The revelation of the Last Day can add nothing to our certainty; but it will crown our joy, for we shall see Him as He is, and be for ever like Him.

X.

PARTIZANSHIP.

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these . . . [and amongst them] . . . strife, seditions, heresies.”—GAL. v. 19, 20.

YOU see at once that if strife, seditions, heresies are works of the flesh, they are not sins of the body like drunkenness and revellings; and this shows that St. Paul is speaking not specially of the body, but of the sinfulness which taints body, soul, and spirit alike. Indeed, the sins of the body which make men outcasts from society may often be less grievous before God than the sins of the spirit which are found among the greatest in the land. The drunkard in the street may be less depraved than the statesman who despises justice and mercy, or the student who puts his learning at the service of some base cause. If it is bad enough to sin like beasts, it is even worse to sin like devils.

But now for the three sins I have picked out from the black catalogue—strife, seditions, heresies. Not one of the three is exactly represented by the English word before you. The spirit of “strife” in this place is not that of quarrelling, but that of the man who

does dirty work for pay—say the roughs at election-times who are hired to break up the other party's meetings; and hence it means partizanship generally. "Seditions," again, has no political meaning: it is the passing strifes and divisions caused by partizanship of any sort, as for instance when the rector's admirers and the curate's fall out with each other. "Heresies" also are not quite what we mean by heresies. In the New Testament they are simply the parties and sects generated by divisions, so that the right side is just as much a heresy as the wrong one, if it is taken up in the spirit of division. Thus the three form a series—partizanship, divisions, sects. From partizanship arise the divisions, and from the divisions the permanent sects and parties: so partizanship is the root of the mischief.

But now, what do we mean by partizanship? It is such a common word forsooth that it does not need explaining; and yet there are plenty of people who quite mistake it. They are ready to call every man of strong opinions a partizan, especially if he is on the other side. Well, a partizan may have strong beliefs and express them strongly, though some noisy persons use strong language rather to conceal their doubts than to express real belief; but scarcely anything is more demoralizing than the common habit of summarily setting down all strongly expressed belief to prejudice and partizanship. Our Lord Himself had some very strong opinions about the Pharisees, and gave deadly offence by expressing them strongly;

and if He is our example, it must be right in some cases to do what He did. Show me a man who has no strong beliefs, and I will show you a husk of a man, no better than the drunkard.

Again, it is not partizanship to belong to a party, and commonly to act with it. We cannot often do much good unless we help others and others help us to do it. There must be parties in Church and State, as long as all men do not see all truth with equal clearness. Meanwhile the choice is between parties contending for truth and factions quarrelling over trifles. It is right and good for Christian men to be members of a party, and keen and eager members too—the keener the better, so long as they keep out the spirit of partizanship.

Partizanship, then, lies not in seeing or contending for one side of the truth, even if our sight is vivid and our contention earnest: it lies in unwillingness to see the other side. Now this is not the amiable weakness it is often taken for, as if it could be excused by zeal for the side we do see, but a deep and deadly sin against truth. At best we are letting one truth blind us to another; and even a pagan can tell us that this is untruth. We Christians have no excuse. When Christ our Master called Himself the truth, He meant more than that He was no deceiver, more even than that every word of His lips and every thought of His heart was true. He meant that He is Himself the final truth of this world and the other, and that in Him all truth in heaven and earth consists

and has its being. All truth comes from Him, and to Him all truth returns, for all things were made by Him and for Him, and in Him shall all things be summed up again, from the archangel to the stones we tread on.

Now consider what a view this gives us of the majesty of truth, and of the supreme duty of loving truth, of receiving it from whatever quarter it may come to us, and of counting all things loss if we may gain truth. The love of truth is the love of God, for every sinful thought is of necessity untrue. Christ our Master claims our worship only because He is the truth, and came to bear witness of the truth. So all words of truth are words of Christ, even though the speaker be a pagan. Truth is Christ's, whoever speaks it; and when the man on the other side speaks truth he is as much Christ's messenger to us as any angel that might come flying in the midst of heaven.

Here is the sin of the partizan. I take him at his best, and lay no blame on him except that he is a partizan. Of course he maintains truth, for every party lives by such truth as it sees; and if he loves that truth and lives up to it, some of you may ask what is wrong with him. This—that he does not love it because it is truth, but because it is his own truth. So far as he is a partizan, he rather defends it as his own possession—no doubt a valuable possession—than looks up with reverence for the word which God may speak to him. He may receive truth from his own friends, but he is not willing to

hear it from the other side. In a word, he wants to learn truth in his own way, and not in God's way; and is not this preferring of our own way to God's way the very mark of untruth and disobedience?

We cannot even read our Bible to much purpose if we read it in the spirit of partizanship. It is all very well to be zealous for truth, and some seem to think that zeal, like charity, will cover a multitude of sins. But our truth is mere untruth if we are not striving to make it not only truth but the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Nay more, there is no deadlier poison than God's own truth if we insist on taking it in our own way. Right belief is something, though it does not raise us a step above the devils who believe and tremble; but infinitely better is the right spirit which answers, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." That spirit is not nearly so common as the world assumes; and without it no man can receive the words of life recorded in Scripture. They are words of life because they are words of Him who is the life, and for such as receive them there is no limit to their transfiguring power. These are the words in which our Lord draws near to us, the words in which He gives us of His life, the life He won for us through shame and death, the life that is stronger than death, the life that is life indeed, the fullness of everlasting life in Christ our Saviour.

XI.

CHANCE.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of these shall not fall to the ground without your Father.”—MATT. x. 29.

“Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?”—LUKE xii. 6.

“CHANCE” is not a common word in the Bible.

The Philistines say, “It was a chance that happened to us”; the Amalekite says, “I happened by chance on Mount Gilboa”; the doubter in Ecclesiastes says that time and chance happen to all men. Our Lord does not speak even once of chance, as He seems to in the English, but of a certain Levite who by a coincidence came that way; and though St. Paul says “the grain, it may chance, of wheat,” he is not thinking of chance at all, but of the grain, whatever it be. Upon the whole, it is only the unbelievers who seem to have any real belief in chance.

Now there is reason for this, for if we think it out, we shall find that God and chance are contradictory words. If there is a God, chance cannot be a real cause of things; and if chance is a real cause of things, there is no room for God. No doubt

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common language speaks as if chance were a real cause, and indeed a common cause of things; and sometimes careless thinkers are tempted to fancy that so it is. But let us take a sentence or two to pieces, that we may see our way better. "I chanced to meet So-and-So this morning." What do I mean? Only that I do not know, and perhaps do not care, what causes brought him in my way. Again, "My penny chanced to come down head." Well, if I threw it up in a certain way, it could not fail to come down head; and if I could always throw it up that way, it would always come down head. I call the result a chance only because I do not know how to be sure of throwing it that way.

Chance, then, is a loose word which ought to mean real causes, though causes which I am not troubling myself to find out. It means that I stop here, and examine no further; and often enough I do well to stop here, for life is too short to find out everything that can be known of all things. But the student—and we ought all to be students of our eternal welfare—has no business to talk of chance till he has found out all the causes he can; and even then he is bound to remember that chance means only the causes he has not found out. The mischief begins when he forgets this, as he sometimes does, and reasons as if a region of confusion lay beyond the region of law and order that we know.

But this cannot be. We see, for instance, how the rain causes the grass to grow, and how the clouds

cause the rain to fall; and the man of science may tell us what causes the clouds to come, and perhaps what causes that: but sooner or later he comes to the end of his learning, and has to stop. Now what is there beyond? Law and order certainly, and not confusion—unless, indeed, the whole universe is a falsehood, there can be no confusion in it but sin. If we knew more, we should see the chain of orderly causes reaching higher still, but only to be lost again in higher clouds of mystery. Yet the mighty chain must have an end—it cannot hang on nothing at all; and if we knew everything, we could trace it higher and higher till we saw it ending where by faith we know it must end, in the one cause of all causes, the one God whose kingdom ruleth over all.

Now you will observe that I have not gone to the Bible for this conclusion. It is no more, I think, than Science tells us, if only we are willing to work it out and not stop short. But what does it mean? It means first that all the works of God are alike His works. There is neither great nor small with Him. He cares for the tiniest of mosses as well as for the hugest of stars. Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like the lilies of the field, and the lilies themselves are not more daintily coloured than the dust of a butterfly's wing. He that made the sun and the moon has made every drop of water a battlefield far more complicated than Leipsic or Gravelotte. God is just as careful of the smallest things as of the greatest.

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Furthermore, it means that the events of history and life both great and small are God's care all alike. He that brought up Israel from Egypt and the English out of Germany is still the God of nations, guiding them by wisdom far above our puny scheming. As of old, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong. Yet He cares for each of us as well as all. An earthly king can look at his subjects only in classes, and single out a few for special notice; but not so the King of kings, the Lord of all the earth. With Him the hairs of your head are numbered, and the odd sparrow is not forgotten.

Even Science might tell us as much as this: for if there is a God at all, He cannot be far from us. He must be just as much in the gentlest winds as in the earthquake and the storm; as much in the common troubles of life as in the rise and fall of nations. It may be a hard thought; but any other idea is absurd when we come to think it out. He is a God of truth and without iniquity. This is the meaning, or ought to be the meaning, of the "divine immanence" which men talk so much of now. It is a great truth which the Lord Himself taught continually, and it has been much neglected. The natural man's easiest way of forgetting God is to imagine that He is an absent king who interferes only on great occasions. The mischief is when some who talk of God's presence in everything forget that He is also the all-sovereign ruler who not only works inside the world but guides

its course according to His godly wisdom. Just and right is He. But what of ourselves? We need no gospel to tell us that we have done wrong; and if God remembers us, as He surely does, we have not given Him cause to remember us for good. Some of our unbelievers seem to be on the very best of terms with Him; but I cannot help thinking them a little too confident. If we set aside the gospel, there is much reason to believe that He will reward us according to our evil deeds; at all events, it is rash to be sure that He will not.

Now comes the message of the gospel. In St. Luke we read, what we might have known before, that the sparrow is not forgotten before God; but in St. Matthew we read that it shall not fall to the ground without our Father. Here is the message: that He is still our Father in spite of sin. He still loves us, sinners as we are, and hates nothing but our sin; and in witness of His love He gave His Son to die for sinners. So where is doubting now? Where are the sinner's fears? Even the unbeliever will grant that, if only this stupendous thing were true, all misgivings ought to be for ever silenced. He that spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for all of us, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? And we know of a surety that the thing is true: we know it by the living power streaming to us from the risen Son of Man, who liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore.

God is all and more than all that Science tells us.

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He is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked. But only in Christ we certainly know that the power which has searched us out and known us is no remorseless Fate, but a loving Father, more ready to hear than we to pray. In Christ we know that God worketh all things for good along with them that love Him. He seeks them for His fellow-labourers—fellow-labourers with God and fellow-workers of the world's deliverance. These are they whom He is training by every trial of every day in life, through toil and pain and victory and joy, to be lights in this world and rulers of the world to come, through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son, saith the Lord."

XII.

“THE SOUL THAT SINNETH.”

“The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.”—EZEK. xviii. 20.

THE revelation of God is the path of the just, which is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. From the dim far-distant ages of its dawning here on earth, that light shone more and more from age to age, till the sun-bright splendour of the incarnate Son of God came bursting on a sinful world. Our text marks a clear stage in the growth of the revelation in Old Testament times.

Modern peoples are made up of men, and each of them answers for his own doings and no one else's. If a man commits a crime, we never dream of punishing his father or his son, unless they had a share in the crime. But ancient peoples were made up of families, and each family answered for its own doings. A man owned his family, and they were looked on

rather as a part of him than as different persons. Thus when Achan was stoned for his evil deeds, his children were stoned along with him, because they were a part of him, and it was not thought right that any part of so wicked a man should escape punishment. It was a matter of course that the offending family should be destroyed, for there was no idea yet that the children could be separated from the man's own sin.

Presently they got glimpses of something better. We are told, as if it was unusual, that when Amaziah, king of Judah, put to death the men who had slain his father, he did not slay the children of the murderers. If such was already the law, it had plainly been very little obeyed. However, they began to see more and more clearly that every man must bear his own burden of sin. But old beliefs die slowly, and two hundred years later there was still a wicked proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Then comes one of the great scenes of history. Ezekiel demolished that proverb for ever. There is no passage in the whole Bible where God protests with more vivid indignation that men slander Him. The soul that sinneth, that soul shall die, and not another. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. When the wicked man turneth away from his

wickedness, he shall surely live; and when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, he shall surely die. “Every one will I judge according to his ways, saith the Lord.”

Ezekiel's work was thoroughly done. From that day to this, neither Jew nor Christian has openly denied that the guilt of a man's sin is entirely his own. The suffering it causes may fall on the innocent, and commonly does, and the shame of it may be far more keenly felt by one who loves the sinner than by the sinner himself; but its guilt no power in heaven or earth can transfer to another. The soul that sinneth, that soul shall die, and not another, saith the Lord. Willing love may stoop to share the sinner's suffering and shame; but almighty love itself is powerless to take up from another the sense of guilt, the evil conscience and darkened understanding, the vile thoughts and self-contempt, the bitter memories and dark forebodings of wrath to come. God may unloose the sinner's burden of guilt, but He will never lay it on another. No man may deliver his brother from death, which is the shadow of sin, far less from sin itself. The soul that sinneth, that soul shall die, and not another.

Can words be plainer? Yet old ideas die slowly. Long after we think we have banished them for ever, they return from some forgotten chamber of imagination, like an old family face coming back after many generations. Many a man who piously assents to Ezekiel's teaching holds beliefs entirely contrary to it.

Sometimes the contradiction is manifest; oftener we have to look into the matter with some care, to find out the inconsistency.

Take first the grossest case of all—the profane and wicked doctrine of the Church of Rome, that saints often do more than earn their own salvation, and that their surplus merits may be sold to sinners. The Church of England says that this cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety, for Christ saith plainly, “When ye have done all that are commanded to you, say, We are unprofitable servants.” And hear God’s word again: “Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in the land that sinneth, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter: they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness.” The arrogant and impious doctrine not only contradicts Christ, but cuts up by the roots the very idea of holiness in God or man.

My next sample is no enormity like this, but an easy confusion of thought, into which almost anyone may fall. A good deal of common language about Dissenters seems to visit on them the sin of their fathers. Now the first Dissenters often separated from us without good cause, though we turned out some of them ourselves without good cause. However, suppose them a pack of sinners without excuse. Even so, their sin is their own, and their followers cannot sin it again without doing what they did. In any case, the sin of men who made a wicked separation is not the same as the sin, if sin it be, of men who

will not close the separation by summarily deserting churches which Christ has owned as well as ours in many a glorious work of faithfulness and loving service.

I cannot fully discuss the bearing of God's words in Ezekiel on the doctrine of the Atonement, but they seem to sweep away every theory that Christ our Saviour bore the punishment of sin in our place. It is true that He bore the sin of many; that He was offered once for all to bear, or rather to carry up, the sins of many; that He bore our sins, or rather carried them up, to the cross. But what He bears is sin, not its punishment. The idea of all three passages is the same: that He carried up sin or sins as a heavy burden to the altar—and the only Christian altar is the cross—and there did away with them for ever. “For the transgression of my people was he stricken,” but not with its punishment; for God is not unrighteous, to visit the sins of sinners on Him that knew not sin. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him and to put Him to grief, because it was fitting that He who brings many sons to glory should make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

It was not possible that the sinless Lord should bear a load like ours of guilt and punishment: what He bore was the burden of suffering and sorrow laid on Him by the sin of the world. You may get a faint idea of that burden by the suffering and sorrow of a saint who wears himself out in ministering to some modern Sodom; but you must not measure it by this.

The holiest of saints is dull and slow with sin, where the Lord saw clear and straight. The love of the holiest saint is limited by sin; but the Lord's was love divine poured out in unceasing and unstinted flow, a love that was never overcome by misery or vileness, a love that embraced all nations of the earth in all generations. Think of the burden of a love like that, refused and scorned by the men to whom His life was given, and you will not wonder that it broke down His human frame before the horrors of the cross had time to finish their work.

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The law that death is the wages of sin is not a thing which almighty power might have ordered otherwise. It is rooted in the nature of things because it is rooted in God's own nature, and with Him is the fountain of life, for sin is separation from Him. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the word of the Lord which came to Ezekiel shall not pass away. So long as sin endures, death must be its wages—not only the death of the body, but the anguish from which our mortal body shields us for the present, the anguish of spiritual destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might. Wherefore turn yourselves and live. Turn to the Lord your God with all your hearts, for He is our Father, and He will abundantly pardon. Yea, He hath already pardoned us in Jesus Christ our Lord, if only we will arise and go to Him, and take our place as sons of God for evermore.

XIII.

GOD'S GOODNESS.

"The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."—Ps. xxxiii. 5.

"The Lord is good to all ; and his tender mercies are over all his works,"—Ps. cxlv. 9.

WE know that this is true, because the coming of the Son of God is an assurance of it from a higher region than that of this world's misery and wrong ; but we cannot wonder if some doubt it who know not Christ, or know Him only at second hand and not for themselves. Some of them think we are living in the worst of all possible worlds ; and many of those who say that they know God are full of rebellion against the wicked injustice with which He gives this world's good and evil to the evil and the good. Had they been with Him in the creation, they would have given Him better counsel. They would have made health catching instead of disease, and allowed no such things as death and sorrow and pain and crying, but given us a world of immortal dolls. So thinks the wise man in his wisdom ; but the foolishness of God is wiser than men. We cannot indeed explain the mystery of sin and evil, but we

can see how God's tender mercy is over all His works in spite of sin and evil.

Go back to the beginning—to a time, if time it be, when living things as yet were not, nor earth nor sun nor stars nor even angels. In the voiceless deep of eternity there was neither being nor will nor mind but God. And God is good, and grudged no creature its being. In mercy did He make them all—for His own glory, if you will, but for no such selfish glory as that of Pharaoh or Sennacherib. His glory is only the good of His creatures, for He delighteth in mercy. God is good: therefore creation can be nothing else than the outflow of His goodness. He looked forward from the first to children who should return His love and become partakers of His nature. Them He foreknew, and for them the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. The mighty universe of blazing suns and rotting worlds was no more than a preparation; for He is not a God of dead matter, but of living creatures linked together in a mighty chain of being, leading upward from the moss that groweth on the wall to the incarnate Lord in whom they all consist and have their being.

So He created man in the image of God and in His likeness, to be the crown and flower of the whole development. And this image of God implies freedom to do evil. Had freedom been refused, had man been given instincts that would always and of necessity keep him right, there would have been no strife or sin or pain or sickness; but man would have been no

image of God, only a machine, or at best a beast of a better sort. There would have been no evil in him, but also no good. The price of our freedom is a disordered world, an ever-growing tangle of sin and misery, a hell on earth of strife and hatred, a caricature of His mercy and a slander on His holiness, for the sinner hath said in his heart, "Tush, God hath forgotten; He hideth away His face, and He will never see it." You may be sure that there is no sin more grievous to God than the evil heart which slanders Him as merciless. Yet for all this God gave us freedom, and allowed our selfish passions to baffle and defeat the plans of His almighty wisdom.

Measure for yourself the guilt of sin, not by the sinner's half-hearted disapproval, not by the misery and ruin it has made in the world, not even by the saint's intensest hatred of it, but by the awful cost of its removal. God so hated sin that He spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for all of us to die on a cross for the sin of the world. Think well what that is from which nothing less than Christ's death was needed to redeem us. Yet if God permitted sin, there must be something worse than sin. He knew that man could sin if he was free to sin; yet He made him free. It must have been better that man should be free to sin than not free at all; and we can see the reason. There would have been no moral meaning in a creation which stopped short of man, with a beast for its final crown and flower, a beast for the completed issue of the toil of many ages.

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It might be a lovely world—far lovelier than the wreck which sin has left—a world perhaps of peace and joy; but it could never be a world of righteousness, and a world without righteousness is not worthy of God. And man without freedom is only a beast, possibly a trifle higher than the chimpanzee, but no image of God, no fitting ruler even for this world, far less for the world to come, which God has not subjected unto angels.

We do God injustice when we think of man as essentially the base and brutish thing he makes himself. To the first Adam, who stands for man in his true nature of ideal innocence and freedom, there was a royal calling given. Standing between two worlds and sharing both, with spirit from above and soul and body from below, he is God's true viceroy on earth, God's proper mediator with Nature, and some will say with fallen angels too. It may be so, it may well be so; but it is more than I dare say. Yet physical evil reigned in the world long before the appearance of man; and if this be moral evil, it implies a fall of angels before the fall of man. Indeed, it may be that sin is rooted much deeper in the universe than it is good for us to know. It may be that the fall of man was not the beginning of sin in the universe, or even the first manifestation of its effects on this earth of ours; for we cannot tell how the long development may have been influenced by sin in other worlds or in those other orders of being to which man is lower for a little while. If

God's universe is one, we cannot suppose the earth partitioned off from such influence, if such there be. But however that may be, the fall of man must have been the coming of actual sin, the blighting of the world by the grievous failure of him who summed up all its powers, and should have lifted it to a higher level.

But if man has made a bad use of freedom, does it follow that freedom is a bad thing? Was God mistaken when He gave it? If that is what you mean, it is better said outright than murmured. There is one thing beyond the power of almighty God, and that is to make us good without freedom. It is a contradiction in terms, for there can be no becoming good without free choice of good instead of evil. Let the guilt and ruin of sin be what it may, the sinner still stands higher than the beasts which have no sin, for he has the potency of higher things than they, and when he turns to God is able to receive them. The gift of life is waiting for us: is God to blame if men refuse it?

After all, man is not the failure he seems. We sinners indeed are failures, as dismal failures as you please, for no strength of ours can even right ourselves, much less cure the ancient sickness of the world. But there is One that is not a failure; and He is flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone, as truly man on the sapphire throne as on the cross of shame. He it is in whom natural life consists and spiritual life has its being, for He is Himself the life,

ever coming down and ever giving life to the world. In Him was life in the eternal world, and in Him is life in that which now is, that we may dwell in Him and He in us. On the cross the power of sin was broken, and its potentates are now but the shadows that will vanish in the morning light. And when all enemies are conquered, and death itself is brought to nought—for in Christ there is no death—then shall we see the fullness of the glory of that old word of still unfathomed meaning, “The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.”

XIV.

ABSOLUTION.

"That ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins."—MARK ii. 10.

I NEED not tell you the story. Before Him is a helpless invalid, brought in by four men on a mattress. The crowd is all agog for a miracle. Some may doubt His power, some His willingness; but they are all thinking, "Are we going to see that palsy cured or not?" But this is not what the Lord Himself is thinking of. "Courage, child; thy sins are forgiven thee." Gentle and gracious—He never calls anyone else child—compared with His frowning words to that other impotent man by the pool of Bethesda, "Be no more a sinner, lest a worse thing come to thee than eight-and-thirty years of sickness." Of that man we hear little good; but this man is different. The sinless eyes have read him through, and seen his yearnings for a better thing than even health. He is a child of God indeed, for strong faith and trust have given him a new heart and a new spirit; and for God's true children there is no condemnation. So with the unerring instinct

of the sinless man, the Lord pronounces his sins forgiven.

Strange words these and shocking to the heartless rabbis watching him. "What! This man blasphemeth. Who can forgive sins but God only?" Who indeed? "Against thee only have I sinned"; and with Jehovah there is mercy. It is He who forgiveth all thy sin, and crowneth thee with mercy and loving-kindness. The rabbis are quite right. Only God can forgive sins: but can a man know when they are forgiven? The Lord has told this man that his sins are forgiven; and in proof that He has authority to say so, He bids him take up his mattress and go home.

But who is it that has this authority? Not the Son of God. Our Lord is not now reminding them that the Son can do nothing but what He seeth the Father do. He says, the Son of Man—"that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power upon earth to forgive sins." This is the first time He calls Himself the Son of Man; and it is a strange title when we come to think of it. We need not trouble about Daniel's vision of one like a son of man, who came to the Ancient of Days, and was given an everlasting dominion. That is the allusion; but the simple meaning of the words will be sufficient. First, then, He claims to be a son of man like other men; and in this He silently claims to be the Son of God. Any man may remind us that he is no more than a son of man; but Christ is the only man who ever

solemnly and repeatedly assured us that He was indeed a son of man. If this is not claiming to be more than a simple son of man, I cannot tell what it is. Again, He has authority because He is not only a son of man, but the Son of Man. He is not only a man, but the one true man of whom all the rest are shadows, the one true man in whom the image of God shines out in all its glory, without spot or stain of sin. All other men are broken lights of Him who never sinned away the dignity and right of man to walk with God in perfect holiness and righteousness till some glorious passage to another world should show forth the power of an endless life within him. All this He means, and more than this: but could He fail to know when sin is forgiven? We sinners are but wrecks of such a manhood as His. If we had a sinless man among us, he might be ignorant of many things, but one thing he would surely know. His pure spirit would recognize the taint of sin, and know when it was overcome by the working of that Holy Spirit in which he lived himself.

Now we can see what our Lord means. An earthly king might say to a rebel who laid down his arms, "Only be a good subject, and I will give you favour as well as pardon"; but the King of heaven says more than this to all that lay down Satan's livery. He calls us not to be subjects and servants, but friends of God and fellow-workers with Him; for His favour is the fullness of joy, and at His right

hand there is pleasure for evermore. And though everyone that hath this hope purifieth himself even as He is pure who spoke the word of power at Capernaum, it is not to win forgiveness that we need to purify ourselves. Forgiveness is no hard-won conquest of our own, but a mighty fact of the eternal world, worked out in time by Christ our Saviour's death on Golgotha. It needs no formal act, like the pardon signed and sealed of earthly kings. Forgiveness is the everlasting gospel of our God; and Christ our Saviour's resurrection from the dead is its memorial to all generations. Neither is it a formal decree which might have been ordered otherwise, but the natural outflow of our Father's love which nothing but sin can check; and even sin shall not for ever check it. So when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, by that sign we know, not that he will be forgiven in the day of judgment, but that he is already forgiven here on earth. So the Lord Himself has told us. "Her many sins are forgiven," says he of the woman that was a sinner, "because she loved much." If she has passed from a state of sin to a state of love, she must be already forgiven. By her love the Son of Man knows it; and by that sign Simon might have known it too.

Forgiveness is not a decree which peradventure God might change, but an eternal fact of His own eternal nature, coming down from regions far above the puny mimicries of yesterday's priestlings. Commission to declare it is given to all Christian people,

to tell how great things the Lord hath done for them, and hath had compassion on them. It is their privilege and duty—necessity is laid on them. Can the bursting joy of thankfulness be hidden—the joy of sin forgiven leaping up within them to eternal life? “O taste and see that the Lord is good,” sums up all Christian preaching; and the Son of Man has sent all that know forgiveness to bear witness of it.

What office then is left for Christ’s ministers? They cannot forgive sins themselves; they cannot even declare God’s forgiveness more certainly than other men. I quote a pagan when I say that priests know no more than other men, because the only inspiration is in submission to a pure and holy will. We need no priests to offer sacrifice for sin—Christ has done that once for all—no priests to tell us of our Father’s love, no priests to stand between the risen Saviour and His ransomed people. Yet it does not follow that the ministers of Christ speak idle words when they declare and pronounce the forgiveness of sins. Far from it. Though they can say no more than other men, they can say it with authority, for they are “messengers, watchmen and stewards of the Lord,” and their commission is as divine as if the Lord Himself had laid His hands on them. They know no more than others who is penitent—no man born in sin can know for certain—but whoever *is* penitent, to him the pardon they declare is as certain as if the Lord had spoken it Himself. In time of

trouble we need the comfort of their solemn declaration on God's behalf that He forgives—not us in particular, but all who are truly penitent ; and in the hour of death we may need still more to have the tumult of doubt and carnal fear calmed by the strong assurance which they have power and commandment to give us, that no man ever came to Christ in vain.

The benefit of absolution by the ministry of God's holy word is not that we stand the better for it in the sight of God, but that it relieves our burdened conscience. If you are penitent, you are forgiven, though the priests should curse you to your face, for the curse causeless shall not come to pass. From the Church militant it may separate you ; from the Church triumphant never. On the other hand, there is no forgiveness for the impenitent, though every priest on earth should absolve him. God has told us on what conditions He pardons sin, and by His commandment we His ministers declare them to you ; but no absolutions that we pronounce can alter them a hair's breadth. In the Absolution of our Morning Service, the forgiveness is only for such as are penitent : and if the sick man in the Visitation Service is not expressly reminded of this, the reason is not that absolution will avail him without penitence, but that we have good reason to think him penitent. See what he has done. He has declared his belief, professed his penitence, and proved it by forgiving all his enemies, asking forgiveness of all whom he has offended, and making amends to the uttermost of

his power to all whom he has injured. What more can we ask him to do? If he is satisfied of God's mercy, we have no right to press an absolution on him, but must go on to the prayer for forgiveness. But if he feel his conscience troubled with some weighty matter—not otherwise—he shall be moved to make a special confession of his sins; and then if he humbly and heartily desire a fuller assurance of God's mercy — not otherwise — what then? When he has done all this, can we refuse to believe him? If he is a liar after all, a liar in the face of death, he lies to God and not to us, and his judgment is with God and not with us.

Remember, there is no *viaticum*. We may be able to help you in the hour of death—I hope we may—but nothing we can do in the way of sacrament or absolution is of the smallest value in the way of opening the kingdom of heaven to the impenitent. We or others may help you to be penitent; but there our power stops. If you are penitent, you are already forgiven, for God is more ready to hear than we to pray. If you are not penitent, the wrath of God abideth on you, and no sacrament or absolution can prevent it coming on you to the uttermost. Let no child of Satan lull you to your last sleep with the lying words which tell you that God will be more merciful to you if a priest absolves you. There is no key to heaven but penitence; and no other can there be till eternal right is dead, and everlasting love is turned to folly, and the liar Satan is the lord of heaven.

But whatever you do, do not put off your penitence to the hour of death. No doubt the devil has often told you that penitence will open heaven, however late in life it comes ; and so indeed it will. But can you expect that true penitence will come of a sudden in the hour of death ? I pass over the serious danger that some accident may cut you off without a moment's time for your penitence, and the still more serious consideration that every day's delay is hardening you in sin. The greatest danger in the weakness of your mortal struggle is that of mistaking carnal fear for penitence. Many a man who seemed all penitence in a deadly sickness has gone back to his sin the moment he was well enough. I do not think death-bed repentances are more likely to be true than others, but much the reverse. If you cannot even reverse a train in a moment, far less can you reverse your whole life in its last moments.

God give you grace and truth to ponder well His message of forgiveness which by His power and commandment I declare to you, that you may bring forth fruits of repentance unto life eternal—life to God in this world and in the world that passeth not away.

XV.

A GOSPEL WITHOUT MIRACLE.

"If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin."—JOHN XV. 24.

MANY people in our time stumble at the miracles of the New Testament. They can understand our Lord's teaching—say the Sermon on the Mount—and admire the grandeur and beauty of His character. But, say they, need we believe those miracles? We have heard such things before; and if we do not believe them of other men, why should we believe them of that interesting Jew? Is not Science telling us every day more plainly that miracles are absurd? Had we not better make our peace with Science once for all by dropping from the gospel everything miraculous?

Well, this is one way of making our faith—what is left of it—secure enough: so let us try. But if we mean to cut out miracles, we must cut them all out. A few of the obscurer healings may possibly be allowed to stand as purely natural; but, on the other hand, we must cut out every discourse of our Lord which rests on anything miraculous. The Sermon on

the Mount, for instance, begins and ends with miraculous claims, and might not be easy to expurgate. Try it for yourself, say on St. Matthew's Gospel, and you may be surprised to find how very little of it is left. Altogether, I doubt if we should be quite safe in saying very much more than Tacitus tells us, that one Christ was put to death by Pilate as a religious disturber. And the crucifixion is not a satisfactory creed without the resurrection.

However, suppose fragments enough left to give us a tolerable idea of Christ; though we must be very careful not to fill it in, as these people commonly do, from the parts we have just cut out. Of course there is no question now of a Son of God who came down from heaven to be the Saviour of the world, for this is miraculous, and therefore incredible. We get a man like ourselves, a great and good man who seems to have said remarkable things, though most of them may have been invented for him along with his miracles. He cannot be more than a great philosopher and teacher, now that his divinity of sinless might and majesty is gone. However great he be, he is but a child of human weakness and ignorance, and has infirmities and errors like the rest of us. His word is no longer the Verily, verily of the Son of God who never spoke a Peradventure: it is hardly more than Francis Bacon thought on this wise. Down at once and down for ever falls his lofty claim to be the light of the world, the rest of the weary, the hope of the lost, the resurrection of the dead; and the old faith

that he is able to save to the uttermost—the old faith whose victories blaze through the ages like the stars of heaven—is only the most pathetic of all delusions. And a strong delusion truly it has been, for just the noblest things in history and life are fatally tainted with falsehood and idolatry if that Jesus whom they crucified went down to the grave confounded, and never rose with power from the dead.

By all means cut out miracle from the gospel, if truth compels you; but do it with your eyes open, and not under the delusion that what is left is worth keeping. From the historic Incarnation linking God and man for evermore and carrying the promise and the power of life eternal, we go back to the peradventures and uncertainties of mere philosophy. And philosophy is at best but law, for it can only give commands; and law can do no more, though God should speak it from the cliffs of Sinai. You say that your philosophy commands much the same things as Christ. Very well; but where will you find strength to do them? We can find strength in love of Him that liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore, and has the keys of death and the grave. But where will you find it? Philosophy, I know, has been a lamp of God, but only to her chosen few. Is there power in your human Christ to transfigure the man in the street, and make his careworn face resplendent with righteousness and peace and joy? Is it one that died, but not for the sin of the world, who can give us

power to rule our stormy passions and wither the roots of sin within us? Is it one that died and never rose again who can raise us from our death of selfishness and send us down into the world again as living men with hearts renewed and strength recovered, in thankfulness and joy to give our life to him who gave his life for us? Is it a Christ like yours, a mere man like one of us, who endues his servants with the power from on high that laughs to scorn the wiles of the world and the terrors of the wicked, and bathes their glistening faces in the light which tells us that they verily have gazed on the eternal countenance, and been transfigured by it into the image of the love that passeth understanding.

These things are not dreams of enthusiasts, but sober experiences of sober men. Ask of the heroes of Christ in the past, and unfold for yourself the stately roll of those who at the cost of life itself bore witness to no such Christ as yours, but to the risen Son of Man who is the Son of God. Ask of the heroes of Christ who are living now—in the palace or the cottage matters nothing—and they will tell you with one voice that the power which turned their weakness into strength is not of mortal birth, but comes down from the right hand of the majesty on high. This is no dream of sentimentalists, no passing excitement, no mere national enthusiasm, but the deliberate and sober testimony of a mighty multitude, of all characters, all ages, and all countries. Even Science has no such cloud of witnesses, of those who say they speak of that

they know. We are dealing not with old wives' fables, but with a tradition august and ancient, proved by centuries of fiery trial, and verified age after age in the personal experience of the brightest and noblest of the children of men. Think it over well, and think it over yet again, before you take upon you to pronounce that History's mightiest facts are hollow, History's mightiest forces mere delusions. Be he the Son of God or be he that deceiver, he is still the light of men.

But this scientific necessity for rejecting miracles is purely imaginary. I draw the line there, though I can go a long way with the unbeliever. I reject the supernatural as heartily as he does, and could wish the word were dead and buried. I believe as he does that the universe has never seen a breach of law, and fully agree with him that if miracle be such a breach, it is not only false, but absurd and unthinkable. I am quite willing to grant that all life may have come from a single germ; and even if it came from inorganic matter, I see nothing in the gospel that would need revision. But now I have a question to ask. Here are light, heat, and the rest of the forces known to Science. Do they work themselves, or is there something behind them? Nothing that we can know, replies the Agnostic. But that is no answer to my question. Is there nothing at all behind them? He cannot say this, for he quite agrees with us that there is a Force behind them which sets them going and constantly co-operates with them. We know that

Force as God, but he says that it is quite inscrutable. Well, we need not discuss this now; but if we add that this Force works by law, he is not likely to dispute it.

This is the Agnostic ground; and Agnosticism is the one dangerous form of open unbelief—dangerous, because it would be Christian if its logic were half as sound as its science. On this ground I see no reason for thinking a miracle any more unlikely than any other event which cannot return—say a comet in a parabolic orbit. The old Deist might tell us that God never interferes with the world; but the Agnostic's Force interferes constantly, and he cannot limit beforehand the action of a Force he confesses to be inscrutable. It acts by law—that is granted—but there is no reason to think that all laws are yet known to Science. "Miracles do not happen now": but why should they? The gospel comes to the unbeliever as a theory; and he is bound to treat it like any other theory, not picking holes at random, but taking it as a whole and provisionally assuming it true before comparing it with facts. Now it is not our teaching that miracles happen in all ages; but it is our teaching that the Force which works in all things worked in Christ in a very special way. This, of course, we shall have to prove; but it can hardly be denied that if a unique power was working in the world, it was likely to produce unique effects. In other words, Christ was not above law; but if He stood in a different relation to the world from ours,

He may very well have been able to do things we cannot do.

The positive evidence for miracles I cannot now discuss. I will say only that even students do not always realize its multifarious character and cumulative strength; and that the central miracle of our Saviour's resurrection is to the best of my judgment as well attested historically as any event I know, and would have exceedingly strong evidence even if the Gospels were lost. For instance, the existence of the Lord's Supper has to be accounted for; and there is no accounting for it unless the Resurrection be true. But enough of controversy. We know in whom we have believed. We know Him, and we know that we know Him. And if we are faithless, He abideth faithful. One thing we know, that whereas we were blind, we see. No theoretical difficulties can for a moment shake the absolute and final certainty of spiritual knowledge to one that knows, and feels the joy of life eternal flowing to him here on earth from the risen Son of Man, who is our Teacher and our Guide, our Saviour and our God for evermore.

XVI.

THE LORD'S SUPPER.

“As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”—1 Cor. xi. 26.

I CHOOSE to-day one of the most controversial of all subjects in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, because it is also one of the most useful of all subjects, if only we are willing to take it seriously. Nor is there any occasion to quarrel over it. I have no right to quarrel with a man simply because I think his opinion false; and he has no right to quarrel with me for plainly telling him so, provided I do it in a proper way—not as a taunt to be flung at him, but as an opinion which some duty requires me to give. No quarrel can arise unless one of us takes the opportunity to let loose a bad temper.

Now, all the opinions on the blessing of the Lord's Supper can be reduced to three. Either the blessing is in the faith which uses rightly the bread and wine, or else there is a blessing in the bread and wine itself, or else there is no peculiar blessing in the sacrament at all. One or another of these opinions must be true; and though they are very far from being equally

true, each of them stands for a truth we need to remember. We will begin with the last of them.

Those, then, who say that there is no peculiar blessing in the sacrament do not mean that there is no blessing at all in it, for we are all agreed that "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." They mean that the blessing of the Lord's Supper is the same blessing as is given in other ordinances. It is a blessing specially promised, but not a different blessing. Christ has but one blessing for us, which includes all the rest, and that is Himself—that we should dwell in Him, and He in us; that we should be one with Him, and He with us. And if He gives Himself in the Lord's Supper to faith, He gives Himself equally to faith wherever He finds it. Faith will obey Christ's last command; but His blessing is no wise hindered if extremity of sickness or any other just impediment prevent us from receiving with our mouth. Our friends do well in telling us that the Lord's Supper is a badge of our Christian profession, and a sign of the love that we ought to have one to another; but the Church of England does well telling us that it is also something more. It is our memorial of thanksgiving for the great sacrifice on Golgotha; and because it is a thanksgiving, it is itself a sacrifice and a means of grace—a means which Christ Himself appointed and will most surely bless to them that rightly use it.

Those also stand for a truth who tell us that the blessing is in the bread and wine, for Christ com-

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manded us to eat and drink them, so that there is no blessing for us in the sacrament unless we do eat and drink them. To come to it with any other intention is pure and simple disobedience and misuse of holy things. It is also most true that the blessing, namely Christ, is offered to us in the sacrament by His appointment, not conjured into it by any doings of our own. It is offered; therefore faith can eat and drink to everlasting life, while unfaith can eat and drink only to condemnation. He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, his sin is not in receiving Christ unworthily, but in so misusing the sign that he does not receive Christ at all.

Our friends do well when they remind us of these things, for we need to remember that faith is the means by which we receive the gift, not a merit by which we win it for ourselves; but the Church of England does well insisting that faith *is* the means, and therefore in denying this second opinion also. Though we cannot have the blessing of the Supper without the bread and wine, it does not follow that the blessing, namely Christ, is in the bread and wine. If Christ is present at all—and He surely is present—He must be present either bodily in the bread and wine, or spiritually to him that eats and drinks by faith. These two are the only possible beliefs: any other is unthinkable. I know that there are plenty of phrases; but if we are not talking at random, we shall find that we are shut up between these two beliefs, and cannot help meaning one or the other of

them. Most, indeed, of the phrases are used both ways. The "real presence," for example, sometimes asserts a true effectual presence to faith as against no presence at all, and sometimes denies it in favour of a bodily presence in the bread and wine; so if anyone uses the word, he ought at least to make up his mind which he means.

Let us take one of these phrases to pieces, and ask what we ought to mean by a spiritual or sacramental presence of Christ in the bread and wine. I think we shall find it very like a square circle—a contradiction in words. On one side it may be fairly argued that a spiritual or sacramental presence is at all events a presence of some sort. But what do we mean by presence? You know what my presence in the church means, for here I am in the pulpit and nowhere else. But God's presence is not like ours. He is not more present in the church than in the street, or less present in the street than in the church. "The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" We mean not that God is bodily present in this work of wood and stone, but that He is spiritually and therefore truly present to everyone who worships here in spirit and truth. We have so set it aside in sign of holy things that no man who comes here in faith can go away without his blessing—and faith is not belief in mysteries, but willingness to do God's holy will. So also Christ Himself so set aside the bread and wine in sign of our

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spiritual food that no man who comes to His holy table with faith as a grain of mustard seed can go away without His blessing, which is Christ. Such power from on high is offered in this holy sacrament to all that are willing to receive it. But a presence which is not bodily must be spiritual. You may call it real or objective or sacramental or anything else; but if it is not bodily, it must be spiritual; and if it is bodily, it is not spiritual. Even a presence "after the manner of a spirit," namely a ghost or apparition, is only a bodily presence, for the eye can see it; whereas a spiritual presence is what eye hath not seen nor ear heard, for it is spiritually discerned. Earthly signs and symbols may help us to feel it; but it cannot be in them, for it is the touch of spirit on spirit, which only spirit can feel. The bread and wine are the helps Christ gave to faith; but more than this they cannot be, for it is absurd to fancy that we can take and eat of spiritual food by any other means than faith, which is willingness to do God's holy will.

Now a man means well, if this is what he means by saying that Christ is present in the bread and wine; but the words are misleading and dangerous, for it may be very fairly argued on the other side that a presence which is *in* the bread and wine cannot be spiritual, but must be bodily, so that we must needs fall down and worship it—which is idolatry not fit to be named among Christians. Christ commanded us to eat and drink the bread and wine, not to worship

it ; and if a man says he worships Christ in that form, how is he better than Jeroboam, who worshipped God in another form ? If this excuse is good, idolatry becomes an impossible sin, and the Second Commandment stark nonsense.

But why do really spiritual men cling to the belief that the blessing is in the bread and wine ? For one thing, some of the stoutest defenders of the false belief are really living on the true. They have spiritually discerned that Christ is verily present in His holy ordinance, and need no man to tell them that spiritual things are partly mysterious even to the spiritual man. Sometimes he fancies there is some irreverence in asking what sort of a presence it is, or even in reasoning about it at all ; and if a man will not reason, he must take up his beliefs at random. Sometimes he has a confused idea that a bodily presence is a greater mystery, and therefore more likely to be true ; and sometimes a touch of the carnal man's inveterate delusion that a bodily presence is more real, and therefore more likely to be effective. Sometimes he turns like Luther to the single word, "This is my body," and begs the question that our Lord meant it to be more literal than "I am the door, or the light of the world." If his spirit has outgrown the false belief, his reason has not. He lives by the truth it shelters ; and the poison that lies next is not poison to a man whose heart is right ; or it may be that he clings to the truth in the form he is used to, in sheer terror that he may lose everything

if he changes anything. Yet when the devil tells us that a spiritual presence will do us no good, are we to agree with him that the bodily is better? A very little consideration will show that a spiritual presence in the sacrament is not only nearer and more effective than a bodily presence in the bread and wine, but the only sort of presence which can possibly do us any good at all. If Christ Himself were to come in at yonder door, would any man in his right mind turn away from Him to the bread and wine? Yet we should be no better for His presence than the old Pharisees, if He was not also present in our hearts by faith.

Christ ordained the Supper of the Lord as our memorial of His death for our salvation. Because it is His own memorial, it is our communion with Him; and for this reason, as well as because He commanded us to do it together and not separately, it is our communion with each other. Because it is the memorial of a sacrifice, it is a feast of thanksgiving; and so far as it is a thanksgiving, it is itself a sacrifice. Above all, because our communion is not with a mortal saint or prophet, but with the Son of God who is the ever-living Son of Man, it is the power of God unto salvation; and the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which by faith we spiritually eat and drink, not only in the Supper of the Lord, but in every work that is done on the wide earth in true and willing love—that body and blood is meat and drink indeed, which shall strengthen and refresh our spirit, and preserve our body and soul unto everlasting life.

XVII.

THE NATURE OF ETERNAL LIFE.

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”—ECCLES. ix. 10.

THESE, as you see, are the words of a sceptic who does not believe in any life after death. He gives us good advice, with a very bad reason for it. Says he, Make the most of this life, because there is nothing beyond it. Say we, Make the most of this life, because beyond it is life eternal. But what do we mean by life eternal ?

We all say that we believe in it and hope for it ; but I fancy few of us have much notion of what it means. People have a vague idea that it is a very fine thing ; and that is about as much as they think of it. No doubt it means a good deal that we cannot understand ; but we are told quite enough about it to show that God means us to have a fairly clear idea of it.

The idea common in my own childhood, and I believe not uncommon among ourselves, is something of this kind. On some far distant day the arch-

angel's trumpet sounds, the graves are opened, and the great white throne is set. After that, perhaps, but not before it, life eternal will be given to us; and thenceforth we shall walk through streets of pure gold, in the pomp and pride of white apparel; or peradventure our spirits will somehow float about in glory, singing hymns in the air; and when ages of ages of the time to come are past, we shall still be living in the same stupid stagnation of ease and idleness for ever.

But some will say, "All this is in the Bible." So it is, as plain as black and white can make it; but you know you can get as much falsehood as you please from the Bible, if you choose to read it without regard to common sense. If heaven were no better than this, we should soon get heartily tired of it. But can we seriously take these things as literal fact? Can we for example believe that the new Jerusalem is just about 1500 miles long, and broad and high, that its twelve gates are each a single pearl, or that the wall round it is 220 feet high? This is what St. John tells us, and I am sure he tells us truth: only I cannot think he ever meant it for literal fact, any more than our Lord ever meant that He was Himself a literal door with bolts and hinges.

Can we not get some worthier idea of heaven than this? Shut up your Bible for a moment, forget your Saviour, forget even that there is a God; and then ask, What is the noblest life we can imagine?

There is a bestial and selfish happiness of ease and sloth and idleness, and there is a manly joy in putting forth our powers to overcome difficulties and to help others. Which of these is the higher? No doubt which is the easier; but even the unbeliever will tell you that a life of effort is nobler than a life of sloth. Is not every joy worth having won by effort? The purest and keenest of this world's joys is in the hardest of the struggle, when per-adventure life itself is perilled for a worthy cause, and if need be joyfully laid down in the proud assurance that it has not been lived in vain. Even if there were no God at all, the noblest life we could imagine would still be one where all the powers of our being in their fullest strength are striving for the loftiest purpose we can think of, whatever that may be.

The low idea of heaven has at least one clear point of truth—that it is a state of rest; and rest we sorely need—the rest which the world cannot give. But what is rest? The hard toiler on one side, the selfish trifler on the other, are tempted to think that idleness is rest. For the sick man it may be—that I leave to the doctors—but not for man in health, except for a short time, and only that he may get fresh for work again; and even this he can very commonly do better by turning for a while to work of another sort. Only the busy man of keen activity and many interests—the man who scarcely seems to rest at all—can draw from life its full delight.

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There is a whole philosophy of happiness in "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." The high pressure and intensity of life in our own time is in itself a blessing: it is made a curse only by our rivalries and worryings, by selfish greed and selfish anxieties. No life could be too intense and strenuous if we were all brethren, each helping others and all casting their care on Him that careth for us all.

This is nearly what the Apostle says: "Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves." The word "fervent" is misleading, for it is not the same here as where we are told to be fervent in spirit, or that the elements shall melt with fervent heat. The idea is of a string always on the stretch. So, says he, keep your love always on the stretch—not in bursts of emotion, but in steady earnestness. There must be no caprice or slackness in it, but earnest and unremitting effort to keep it at its best.

If, then, eternal life is the noblest we can imagine, it cannot be a life of ease and sloth. It must be one that calls for all our powers of heart and soul and mind, and keeps them for ever satisfied by full employment. If it left any sinless part of human nature unused, or any sinless hopes and yearnings unfulfilled, it would be imperfect, and therefore not eternal. It must find a use for everything but sin, for Christ came to destroy nothing, save the works of the devil. So He says: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and

Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." He means, however, not that eternal life is in having the knowledge of God, but in striving to have it. And is not this true to human nature? The pleasure of things is in striving to obtain them: the quiet possession of them is a very tame affair. So in the highest of all things. Eternal life is the striving after that which fully satisfies our whole nature, and will for ever satisfy its utmost needs.

And what is that? What is the loftiest aim we can imagine? Some seem to think it is the worship of God; and they are not far wrong. Only remember that even here on earth the chief part of our worship is not the services we do in church, but the life we live in the world. The only value of what we do in church is that it is our best help to live in the world as His children should live. If worship is to be the loftiest of all aims, it must not be limited to devotions: it must cover the whole of life before this is true. But there is no occasion to be wiser than the Lord Himself, who spoke of knowledge. All earthly aims fall short, because none of them can fully satisfy our whole nature. Be it wealth or fame or power, it leaves whole regions of our nature uncultivated. But the knowledge of God is infinite; and that not simply because God is infinite, for the infinity might lie entirely in regions beyond our reach. But this cannot be the case, if man is the image of God. Every part of sinless human nature must be truly represented in

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God's nature, however infinite it be in unimagined heights and deeps unfathomed. And the knowledge of God is not to be won by reason only; it calls also for all our powers of heart and soul. It is not the creed we profess or the truth we see, but the life we live, which is the revelation of God. This, then, is life eternal—the endeavour to know God which alone calls out and for ever satisfies every power of our being. It is the infinite life of infinite desire, for ever satisfied by the infinite love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

If life eternal consisted in fully knowing God, neither man nor angel could ever attain it. But even we sinners can by His grace endeavour to know Him here on earth; and therefore even we sinners can have life eternal here on earth. Yes, the life we live to God is life eternal here on earth. Sorrow may dim its glory, sin may mar its beauty, and the darkness of the grave may seem to close over it for ever. But though the things that are seen shall pass away, that life is incorruptible, for it is Christ within us. The stroke of death shall only scatter once for all the clouds of sin which hid its brightness. When heaven and earth have passed away, and everlasting stars have ceased to shine, the old life in Christ which men despised—the life which struggled so painfully through this vale of sin and sorrow—shall shine out in the fullness of its glory, resplendent with immortal joy before God's throne for evermore.

XVIII.

“WHY IS IT JUDGED INCREDIBLE?”

“Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?”—ACTS xxvi. 8 (R.V.).

THOUGH Cæsarea bore a name of Roman origin and was the seat of Roman government, it was a Greek city built on Jewish soil, so that the ancient world of Israel and Greece and Rome was all represented in the company to whom St. Paul threw down this challenge. On the seat of judgment sat Festus the Roman governor, and on the throne beside him the Jewish king Agrippa. Jewish accusers, Greek magistrates, and Roman soldiers were in attendance, and a mixed crowd of Greeks and Jews filled the body of the court. And what faith did he find in that splendid concourse? Festus was a heathen, Agrippa was a sceptic, and even the pious Jews could hardly get beyond Martha's words: “I know that he shall only rise again in the last day.” St. Paul alone could thunder out with absolute and final certainty the glorious message which has made our modern world: “Christ is risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For^{as} in Adam all die, even so

in Christ shall all be made alive." To such a man it is but natural to throw down the searching question, "Why is it judged incredible, if God doth raise the dead?"

And this is the question which the minister of the risen Christ is bound to ask in every age; for if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and Christian faith is also vain. I do not want just now to set forth the evidence that God has raised the dead indeed: I only put St. Paul's question. Is the story so incredible beforehand that we hardly need to trouble ourselves about the evidence? I do not see how we can say this, unless it be certain that there is no God at all. But if there is a God, it seems rash to say beforehand that He cannot do this, and hardly less rash to be sure that He will not do it. It is marvellous, I grant; but I cannot see that it is any more marvellous than things we see every day. "All things end in mystery," was the old saying. Sometimes the mystery lies quite on the surface, and sometimes Science has pushed it back a little, or shown that it is a part of some larger mystery: but mystery there always is. We walk through mysteries at every step, and every thought we think is a mystery the more. Is it quite incredible that any voice can reach us from the realm of darkness? Is it certain that the unknown is everlasting silence?

There is just one thing we can say for certain that God will not do. He will not show a character entirely contradicting that He shows in the world.

Those, then, who say that miracle is incredible beforehand are bound to show that the character of God it implies entirely contradicts that which we see in the world. This is the only way they can possibly make out their case.

Some caution is evidently needed here, if only on the general ground that it is rash to take for granted that God is easier to understand than men. But a miracle is confessedly something different from the ordinary course of things known to us, so that it will show God in a different light. Therefore it cannot be objected to because it gives us a different idea of God, unless that idea is inconsistent with what we learn from the world. Difference is only what we might expect; but is there downright inconsistency?

Yes, answer some. The laws of Nature are fixed; but miracles break them. They imply that God is capricious; and this is inconsistent with the regular working of the world. In other words, miracles do not happen now; therefore they never did happen. Well, I ask, what do you mean by saying that the laws of Nature are fixed? If I throw up a stone, you cannot *prove* that it will come down again. Every stone I ever heard of did come down, and it is my nature to expect that the next will come down; but I cannot prove that it will. I quite believe that the same causes will always lead to the same results; but the smallest difference in the causes may lead to entirely different results. I do not expect that any unknown force will come into action; but if it does,

perhaps the stone will not fall. And science is neither omniscience nor prophecy, to tell us for certain that no unknown force is acting. Now, suppose I catch the stone: does that break the law? No; it is acting still, as I feel from the weight on my hand; but after all, the stone has not fallen, and the course of the world is different from what it would have been without me. If I can do this, and even a beast can do it, will it be safe to say that only God cannot? And if God acts at all, surely it is rash to say that anything whatever is too hard for Him.

Quite so, it will be answered: but the question is not of what God can do, but of what He will do. If He can do miracles, it does not follow that He will. This, I grant, is most true. But does the regularity of His working amount to an engagement that He will never use any forces beyond those at present known to science? I think nobody will be hardy enough to say this. And if He is free to use forces not at present known to science, can we be sure that all of them will some day be discovered? May not some of them remain for ever unknown? And will not these be enough to account for some things different from the course of the world as known to us?

But is it not caprice after all, if God's action in any way changes the ordinary course of the world? I am afraid this argument proves too much; for we change it ourselves every moment of our lives, yet our actions are not all of them caprice. But it may still be urged that if God laid down the laws of the world as we say

He did, they must express His character ; so that it is absurd to suppose that He breaks them. This is a sound argument ; but two things need to be noticed. The first is that we do not yet know all the laws of the world. The other is that if there be a God in any sort of relation to us, it may be that the laws of the world at present known to us do *not* fully express His character, if we refuse to take into account some facts which we call miraculous. The present limits of science are not necessarily the limits of God's action in the world.

Here comes in a point of great importance, which is very commonly overlooked. If we care to know whether the gospel is true, we are bound to take it provisionally on its own showing, and not set up dummies of our own in its place. Now it is not the teaching of the gospel, that God works miracles in all ages. Almost all of those we find in Scripture belong to three short and plainly critical periods. They group round Moses, Elijah, and our Lord. They are not isolated physical marvels, but connected portions of a moral scheme. We throw aside nine-tenths of the case before us if we ignore their moral character and their connexion with each other. If, then, it be objected that miracles do not happen now, I answer, Why should they happen ? If the gospel tells us truly that Jesus of Nazareth is the final and sufficient revelation of God, we have no right to expect that it will be helped out with a series of miracles in later ages. Or will it be said that a power which once

worked miracles cannot help itself, but needs must go on working miracles, whether they are wanted or not? There are scientific facts which we shall never be able to verify; yet nobody doubts, for example, that certain comets move in paths that will never bring them to our sight again. If the objection, They do not happen now, is fatal to miracles, it is equally fatal to these undoubted facts.

There is one other great reason which men give for saying that miracles are incredible beforehand. If they are true, they show that God is merciful and good; and this, we are told, is inconsistent with the cruelty He shows in the world. Are not the laws of Nature utterly merciless? So they are, in the sense that whoever breaks them will certainly be punished sooner or later. But what should we think of a ruler who made laws, and then neglected to punish offenders? If this be the objection, it is not worth much. But it is urged further that God's laws in Nature are cruel in themselves. Well, the gospel fully recognizes their sterner side. If it is written, "He delighteth in mercy," it is also written on the same page, "God is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked." Think this over. Is it not the very picture which Nature draws of Him—"slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked"? Now, if we could know things beyond the present reach of science, might not possibly this slowness to anger turn out to be based on love and mercy? Nature is good to those who obey her, and if all men

did obey her, few would have reason for complaint. But is not sternness inconsistent with love and mercy? Not at all. The gospel represents God as our Father; and a father's goodness, especially to bad children like ourselves, does not consist in simply giving them everything pleasant. Even for this life's training, it is often the most loving course to let them suffer the consequences of their evil deeds. And if suffering be needed to train us for this life, can we be sure that it is not needed to train us for another life? What confuses the matter is our perverse idea of justice, that every man ought to be rewarded in this life according to his works. I fear it would go hard with us, if God took us at our word and gave us in this life what we deserve. But this, the gospel tells us, is not His purpose. For this life, training, with all the suffering that He thinks needed; for the other, judgment: and not till then will He reward every man according to his work.

Thus there seems to be no reason at all for thinking miracles, and specially our Lord's resurrection, incredible beforehand. Whatever the evidence may be—and for that crowning miracle I believe it is very strong indeed—there is no need to scrutinize it more jealously than the evidence for any common event, if we could imagine any common event of the same importance, for our Lord's resurrection is the kernel of the gospel. A Son of Man who never rose with power from the dead could not be our Saviour and our God. But we know in whom we have trusted. “Now

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is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

XIX.

REGENERATION.

“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”—JOHN iii. 3.

NICODEMUS was a great and learned rabbi. His admirers may have called him the Teacher of Israel; and we may ourselves admire in him better things than mere learning. He is honest and open-minded, and far enough from pharisaic pride to address the carpenter with respect as “Rabbi.” He knows, and some of his friends know too, that “no man can do these signs which thou doest, except God be with him.” He would like to ask some questions; but he is quite willing to believe that the young prophet may have a good deal to do with the setting-up of the kingdom of God. And will not that be glorious? Shall not Israel be made the head of the nations? Shall not the law go forth out of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem?

To his astonishment the Lord tells him he is quite mistaken. What does he mean by the kingdom of God? Imagine the yoke of Rome broken and the Gentiles trodden underfoot, the treasures of the world

poured out before the throne of David, the Temple maintained with more than Solomon's magnificence, the law studied till thousands were more learned than Nicodemus himself. All this would be very splendid; but is the kingdom of God nothing more than the subjection of a rotten Gentile world to a rotten Jewish nation?

With all his learning, Nicodemus has overlooked the plainest teaching of the Old Testament. Though bad government can do a good deal of harm, it is itself the symptom of a much deeper evil. Common sense is enough to show that no government can last very long if it is much worse than the people it governs; and in the same way, neither can it last if it is much too good for them. The questions of government Nicodemus was thinking of are surface matters compared with something else. Let us hear St. John. "If we say that we have no sin, we make God a liar." Every word and deed of God from one end of the Bible to the other bears witness that we are fatally touched with sin, and cannot help ourselves; so that if we deny this, we do worse than say, He lies, in some particular thing, for we make Him a systematic liar in all His dealings with us. The Old Testament witnesses just as plainly as the New, that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. Nicodemus is gone entirely wrong, because with all his learning he has not found out this elementary fact of human nature.

So Christ states it in the plainest way. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The natural man must pass through a change great enough to be called a new birth before he can even see it. If it lie before his eyes, he will see nothing but foolishness. Suppose, for example, I had absolutely no idea of God or sense of right and wrong. In that case I should think it utter foolishness—an unaccountable craze—to worship God or abstain from sin. Well, nobody is quite in that state, though a few of our friends say they are; but I think the natural man comes near it at certain times. Though he knows in his heart that there is a God, he forgets Him whenever he wants to sin; and though he knows well enough the difference of right and wrong, he can confuse them when he sees occasion. Put Christ's words before him, and he may piously agree; but he does not realize or act on them in the least. For practical purposes, he treats them as false.

Yet Christ's word is true, and we cannot have peace with God till we confess its truth. Sometimes indeed the natural man is no mean creature. He may add great ability to the courtesy and learning of Nicodemus, and have winning gifts of placid temper and easy good nature, with boldness and animal spirits that go far to mimic the courage of them that are in Christ. But he is never in touch with God, unless indeed God's witness of him is one great lie from first to last. He can see the beauty of holiness,

and admire it too; but love it—never. He may know the truth, and preach it too; but doing truth is another matter. He sees well the vileness of some bad habit; but shake it off he cannot. Some cold shadow chills his courage and scatters his fine words to the winds, just when he ought to be up and doing. In his heart he feels that the shadow is not his better self, but some alien tyrant: only it is a tyrant he cannot get rid of, and in truth does not altogether wish to get rid of. Stolen waters are sweet—at least for the present. Some day when he is tired of them he will turn to God forsooth; but he really does not see how so vast a change as Christ speaks of can be made.

Neither does Nicodemus; and he says so plainly. “How can a man be born again when he is old?” A spiritual second birth is as hard to understand as a natural second birth. So it is: Nicodemus is quite right so far. How is it possible? Our Lord explains as He goes on. “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” He must be born again before he can even see the kingdom: to enter it he must be born of water and the Spirit. Some take the water for the spiritual washing promised by the prophets; but this is itself the inward grace of the new birth, so that the water is more naturally some outward sign of it like baptism. But what baptism? Not Jewish baptism, which was no more than a Jewish custom, and only

meant for Gentile converts. Not Christian baptism, which our Lord instituted after His resurrection; whereas this is something He blames Nicodemus for not knowing. Then it must be John's baptism, and the word is a delicate reminder that he was one of those who rejected the counsel of God for them, by not being baptized of John. The belief of his heart was all very well, but Nicodemus could not enter the kingdom without confession before men. This was one chief meaning of John's baptism; and of Christian baptism, too, in times when converts ran a fearful danger. Now that we baptize infants, we have to leave the outward confession before men till Confirmation.

But the washing of water avails us only as the outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace. Christ now tells us why the new birth is possible—because it is the work of the Spirit. Nicodemus rightly saw that no powers of the natural man can change the nature that has grown up with him, or shift his desire from self to God, or fill his heart with love of things he feared and shrank from, even while he could not help admiring them. But if the spirit of man is weak, the Spirit of God is strong. How that Spirit works, we know no better than Nicodemus. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Though the gift of another life is the secret of our God, we can often see its mighty

working with our eyes—not only or even chiefly in the sudden conversions which startle hasty thinkers, but rather in the mysterious and peaceful holiness and growth in holiness of many a child of God among us.

Let there be no mistake, for without the new life there is no salvation; and the new life comes from one source only. The things of God are revealed to us by the Spirit, and by the Spirit only. No natural sense can divine them, no earthly learning can discover them, no human teacher can do more than bear witness to them. We have plenty of strange gospels preached as cures for the evil in the world. There are gospels of political reform, gospels of enthusiasm, gospels of refinement, and so on, down to the gospels of superstition and the gospels of selfish pleasure. We should have a paradise, think some, if we could only get the State properly reformed. No, say others, good music and interesting books are more to the purpose. Nonsense, cries another, commerce is the true civilizer of men. Well, some of these gospels are excellent: only they ought not to be preached as gospels, for neither separately nor together can they give us the life we need. The things of God are revealed by the Spirit only, and every man must win them for himself. The Spirit indeed our Heavenly Father gives to them that ask; but ask we must, and that with all the strength of heart and soul and mind, and then we shall not ask in vain. Of one thing be sure. Neither man nor

angel holds the power that can cleanse our hearts and purify the great deep of human wickedness. The Spirit of Christ is Lord, the Spirit of Christ is the giver of life. "Thou must save, and Thou alone."

XX.

“AS A SOLDIER OF CHRIST.”

“As a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”—2 TIM. ii. 3.

I TAKE my question from the Catechism: “What meanest thou by this word *Sacrament*?” but I shall hardly come to the answer given in the Catechism. The word had a long pagan history before it became Christian, and a long Christian history before it settled down into the meaning given in the Catechism. We shall find much instruction in this earlier history.

In the old times, then, of pagan Rome, *sacramentum* meant an oath; and, in particular, it meant the soldier’s oath that he would never desert the eagles, or as we might say, the colours. On this oath Rome built her greatness; and when we look at the Roman centurions who stand out so nobly in the New Testament, we may well feel rebuked before the grand old heathens who kept so well the oath they had sworn before the altars of the gods indeed, but in the presence of the one all-seeing God who gave them grace to keep it.

The Roman soldier had hardships enough. He might have to mount guard on the towers of Damascus or the walls of Chester, or in one of the great camps on the edge of the African desert. His warfare might be on the moors of Scotland or the snows of Russia, and he might have to fight his way up the Nile to Dongola, or down the Euphrates to Babylon. He might have to face the crafts of the Parthian, whose light cavalry shot its cloud of arrows, and was gone in a moment; or it might be the assaults of the German, who fought under cover of the thick northern forest: but no enemy dared meet a Roman legion in the shock of open battle. It was a hard life of twenty years with the eagles, marching under heavy armour, and carrying also spades and stakes, for there was a mighty business of trenching and ramparts when a Roman army camped at nightfall. Yet there was much to sustain him in his hardships. Behind him lay the memories of that glorious past which had made Rome the mistress of the world. It was a grand thing to be Cæsar's man, to have a place in Cæsar's army which barbarian kings coveted in vain, and to bear a part in maintaining the peace of Rome which ruled the world. Nor was he unmindful of the oath he had himself sworn before the gods, whose favour he firmly believed had built up for Rome an everlasting empire, and a dominion that was not to pass away.

Is not the likeness evident? Already the

centurion of Capernaum implied it in his belief, so true and soldierly, that the prophet of Nazareth ruled the host of heaven as Cæsar ruled the Roman legions. St. Paul was a Roman citizen, and pictured the whole armour of God from the Roman soldier by him, just as we see him drawn on the old monuments. Before long it became a guiding thought of the churches that the service of Christ is very like the service of Cæsar, yet in every way still nobler. No mortal Cæsar enlists us, but the Son of God who lives for ever. Our cause is truth and mercy, our standard not the eagle of the legion but the Cross of Christ, and in the love of Christ we have a nobler watchword than any that a Roman centurion ever passed down the ranks. We wield no carnal arms, and guard no earthly walls and ramparts, for the weapons of our warfare are spiritual, and the lines we have to keep are those of the calling God has given us. We too must suffer hardship; but we have subtler crafts and assaults to meet than those of Parthians and Germans, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Our service is not for the twenty years of the Roman soldier, but to our life's end; for ours is a warfare in which the old and the sick, the women and the children, may play the most heroic part of all. Long and splendid as was the list of Roman triumphs, we can rest on a still more glorious record of victories won and deeds of daring ventured for the love of Christ. There is still one crowning likeness. The Roman soldier trusted Cæsar. Whatever might

betide himself, he knew well that no earthly power could stand before the thirty legions which guarded Rome's long frontier of twice three thousand miles, from Sinai to Carlisle and back again. However generals might blunder, the final victory was never for a moment doubtful. Even so we trust our Saviour. If Cæsar was mighty, and ruled the world, Christ is mightier still, and rules all worlds. Whatever may betide ourselves, whatever the doom of sinning nations and sinning churches, He abideth faithful: Himself He cannot deny.

But where is the soldier's oath, the *sacramentum* of the service of the living God? They soon found that in Baptism, where we still promise to be Christ's faithful soldiers and servants to our life's end. Thus the word "sacrament" was first used of Baptism only; and when it was used of the Lord's Supper also, the meaning had to be changed, for the Lord's Supper is not a *sacramentum* in the old Roman sense, though it is like Baptism in being a sign ordained of Christ Himself. But to go back to the early Christians, there was a grim reality in the promise they made at Baptism, as grown men and women, to renounce the devil and his pomps—the magnificent processions of the idol-worshippers, the murderous exhibitions of beast-fights and man-fights, the pollutions and enormities of the theatre. But it is a shame even to speak of the things that were done before the eyes of all men in that old pagan world. The danger

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was a fearful one, and it might come at any moment, and it spared neither man nor woman the sword or the cross or the fire.

We do not make that promise now with our own lips, for we were babies when the words were spoken for us; but they were spoken only because they are our duty, and as our duty we acknowledge them at Confirmation. If we run no such dangers as the early Christians, the dangers that we do run are not less real. The devil seduces twenty for every one he frightens. If Cæsar slew his thousands, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life slay their tens of thousands to this day. Were persecution to return, we might see strange and lamentable falls of those we thought the strongest; but some even of the sinners have stood their ground when they had a plain choice before them, to deny the Lord or die.

Let no man flatter himself that the good fight is grown easier in these latter days. Are the wiles of the world and the flesh and the devil any the less dangerous, if they are veiled in forms our fathers never knew? We need no less than they God's help to do what we have promised; and we need it no less in the weariness of age than in the young days when our passions were strongest. The crafts and assaults of the devil never cease: they only change their form. If you have conquered gross and open sin, look out for the subtle temptations of pride; and if you think you have mastered pride, see to it that

your humility is not the subtlest pride of all. Watch and pray, for of ourselves we can do nothing. But in Christ we can do all things, on one condition. “Be thou faithful unto death,” says He, “and I will give thee the crown of life.”

XXI.

COMMON MERCIES.

“Oh that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men !”—Ps. cvii. 31.

MARK well what it is for which we are to praise the Lord. It is not here the crowning gift of all, the life in Christ. Psalm cvii. is of God's mercies in this life, rather than His grace for another. Deliverance is its keynote, not salvation. It is the Lord who brings into the way such as have erred from it, and gone astray in the wilderness where no water is. It is the Lord who comforts and helps them that are in distress of mind—such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. It is the Lord who shows His pity on prisoners and captives ; for He hath broken the gates of brass, and smitten the bars of iron in sunder. It is the Lord who succours them that are in peril on the sea ; for He maketh the storm to cease, so that the waves thereof are still. Each time they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivereth them out of their distress ; and each time comes the glorious refrain, “Oh that men would

therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men."

These are only samples of His goodness, for He giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. He giveth to all life and breath and all things. He bringeth forth grass for the cattle, and feedeth the young ravens which call upon Him. He crowneth the year with His goodness, and the earth is filled with the fruit of His works. He keepeth our life and preserveth our way; and the darkness and the light to Him are both alike. He maketh poor and maketh rich; He bringeth down to the grave—yea, and hath brought up again, for in Him we live and move and have our being.

Now these are the common mercies of life. Most of them are given to ourselves, and there is hardly one of them but has been given to some we know. Yet many of us have no sense at all of them. How many of us thank God (except in empty words) for even the meat He gives us? How many truly bless Him for the brightness of the day or for the stillness of the night? Many of us, I fear, lie down night after night without a thought of Him who kept us through the perils of the day; and some there are who have seen the angel of death face to face, yet never feel that their life is life from the dead. They may be thankful to the doctor: too often they forget God, whose minister he is.

This marvellous forgetfulness of common mercies is partly an inheritance of evil times. About a thousand years ago the wickedness of men was great in the earth, and it was filled with violence. Then they that feared the Lord turned their thoughts more and more away from this world to one where there is no violence and wrong, and war and hatred are unknown. Sternly they set themselves to refuse the mercies of God in this life, that they might win His grace in that life. They took them for temptations of the devil, and trod them underfoot. The mistake was not unnatural: yet it slandered God as merciless. They forgot that godliness has promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. Christ never gave over this life to the devil's rule. He came to make us good sons and daughters, good husbands and wives, good fathers and mothers, good friends and neighbours, good citizens, good workmen in that state of life to which our God shall call us. Yet there are still forms of religion which say, "Never mind this world, for it is delivered over to evil: have as little to do with it as you can." Beware of them: they are only echoing the old liar's words who said, "All the power of the world and the glory of it is delivered unto me." The things of heaven ye ought to do, but not to leave the things of earth undone. This is the reason why many an Agnostic who knows not God is a better Christian than some of our busiest devotees—if the Agnostic does this world's duties when he sees them, while the devotee neglects them

for services which are meaningless except as helps to do them.

The root of the mischief is unbelief, as usual. We are used to common mercies, and take them as a matter of course. Many a time Christ spoke of this — “consider the lilies of the field” — but I will quote one of His very few sayings not found in Scripture. There is some doubt about it; but I believe He did say—

“He that wonders shall reign;
And he that reigns shall rest.
Look with wonder at the things before you.”

I imagine he was thinking of children; and we have lost the fresh, innocent wonder of children, which brings them so near to the spirit of Christ. “Of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Yet the common mercies are the greatest. The poorest mother in a cottage has the joy of her motherhood as full as the queen in her palace. When the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, he spoke of common things which every Arab of the desert knows—the sea and the morning, the rain and the clouds, the wild goats of the rock and the ostrich that leaveth her eggs in the earth, the horse that mocketh at fear, the eagle that beholdeth the prey from afar—and where the slain are, there is she.

God is as near us in the common things of life as in its great events. So must it be, if He is not a Baal that sleepeth and must be awaked. And the

common things of life are quite as wonderful as our Saviour's miracles. Is not the growth of the living just as marvellous as the resurrection of the dead? One of the evils of our modern life in crowded towns is that we see less of God's common wonders. Much of the unbelief and unhealthy belief that rises from the gutters of the towns might be abashed if it stood before God's wonderful works in the country, from the unfolding green of the spring to the golden splendour of the declining year—itself so like the golden west of a declining autumn day.

The fault is in ourselves. We know God, yet we glorify Him not as God, neither are thankful; and therefore we become vain in our imaginations, and our foolish heart is darkened. We have somehow persuaded ourselves that He never speaks but in the whirlwind and in the storm: and the wonders that He doeth go for nothing, because He doeth them every day. We want a sign from heaven, forsooth, and then we will believe; but we really cannot listen to the common things on which the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind.

God pardon this unbelief of ours, and give us a new heart like the heart of children to look with wonder on the things before us, giving thanks always in all things, that so we may praise our Father for His goodness, and declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men. "Whoso is wise will ponder these things: and they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

XXII.

OUR ALMS AND OBLATIONS.

“The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof.”—Ps. xxiv. 1.

THE goodness of our God fills earth as well as heaven. The thoughts I wish to lay before you to-day come down from a time when old men could still remember the elders who had spoken with St. John. Fourscore years and six had Polycarp of Smyrna served his Lord, when he died a glorious death for Christ: and Polycarp was a disciple of St. John, and the teacher of Irenæus, from whom I take these thoughts.

Strange indeed are the changes which the Lord’s Supper has undergone in the course of ages. At first it was the solemn grace after meat which closed an evening meal; but it has long been commonly held in the morning. Our Lord must have used unleavened bread—rather biscuit than what we call bread—for there was no other bread to be had at Passover time; but most churches now use the common bread of common life. Our Lord most likely mixed the wine with water, as the Jews used to do; but no church now

counts this essential. The apostles lay on couches as they received it; but our custom is to kneel, while in the Scottish Church they sit in their pews, and in the East they stand.

But change has touched more important things than these. In early times, the most solemn part of the service was connected with what we now call the offertory. In those days, people seldom made their gifts in money; but one brought one thing, another another, as he was able, and all were received as offerings of thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth and the blessings of this life and the life to come, and from them were taken the bread and wine for the Supper of the Lord. They were offered to God in a prayer of thanksgiving for all men which roughly answers to our Prayer for the Church Militant; and this was the chief prayer of the service. The Lord's Prayer came later, and the Communion of the people followed.¹ In later times this latter part of the service became elaborate. The old Communion of thanksgiving was turned into a sacrifice for sin, and the offerings of the people were gradually forgotten.²

Let me now call your attention to three rubrics of our Communion Service which are more or less a return to the old custom. The first is that which orders the bread and wine to be provided at the charges of the parish. If that is done, they are even now the gift of the people. The other two come

¹ Words of institution not certain.

² No offertory in the Roman Mass.

after the offertory. The priest shall first humbly present and place the alms for the poor and other devotions of the people upon the holy table; then, when there is a Communion, he shall place upon the table the bread and wine required for it. After which done, he prays, "Almighty and ever-living God . . . we humbly beseech thee most mercifully to accept our alms and oblations, and to receive these our prayers"—though the oblations are not the bread and wine just placed on the table, but the "other devotions," which are not alms for the poor. Thus we humbly present our alms and oblations as an offering of thanksgiving before we pray God that He will grant us to eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood that we may evermore dwell in Him and He in us.

Now what does this offering mean? Under the dull skies of England we hardly realize a thought which is bright with the sunshine of the glorious East of Palestine and Greece. The old Latin service books were formed in times of deep despondency, when it seemed as much as men could do to keep alive any sort of Christianity at all: and though we removed much of their excessive sadness at the Reformation, we are still strangers to the triumphant hope and overflowing thankfulness which runs through the prayers of the Eastern Church. We have but a sample of it in our noble closing hymn, "Glory be to God on high"; and that was never written in the sombre Latin West. Its echoes come down to us from the last

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prayer of Polycarp himself, before the fire was lighted at his feet.

We have ourselves a hurried grace before meat, though nobody listens to it; but to those old Easterns God's bounty was a living truth. They had a deeper sense than ours of His goodness in giving and preserving to our use the kindly fruits of the earth; and in thankfulness for this they offered at His holy table not so much the natural corn and grapes as the bread and wine which the labour of men makes from them. But they had a deeper thought than this. The Lord's Prayer was their prayer of consecration, that the bread and wine just offered might to them become that flesh and blood of Christ whereof He spoke to the Jews at Capernaum. So then, says Irenæus, it is no longer common bread, but bread with a blessing: and just as common bread feeds the natural life which joins our earthly body to our spirit, so this blessing of thanksgiving feeds the spiritual life which joins our sinful spirit to the Spirit of the Lord, in whom is life eternal. So then, if we rightly receive that bread, our bodies as he says are mortal no longer, but have the assurance of an everlasting resurrection. Thus the Lord's Supper is our sacrifice of thanksgiving; and the altar on which we offer it is not here, says he, but in heaven, for to heaven we send our prayers and offerings. Thus our thanksgiving in the Lord's Supper is not for our natural life, nor even for our spiritual life, nor simply for the two together, but for the two together as parts of God's one great gift of life. The

natural life is the earnest of the spiritual, and the spiritual has in it the reality of all that the natural life points to. The two are not strangers to each other, but both together form the mighty gift of life, which Christ came to give us in abundance, the gift for which we thank our God.

That which God has joined, let not us put asunder. Some of us who fancy they are not of this world are a little too much of that world. They forget that the world from which we have to keep ourselves unspotted is not God's glorious world of land and sea around us, but the miserable world of sinners who profane it. We should be all the better if we laid to heart the good message which comes down from God's old church in Asia, that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and that He has given all things in it for our enjoyment, if only we make them holy by thanksgiving. We should face our trials and temptations better if we met them with less of scruples and questionings and remorse for the past, and more of simplicity and thanksgiving and trust for the future; for the spirit of thankfulness, if only it is true thankfulness to Him that died and rose again for us, is itself the dwelling of Christ in us and ours in Christ. The spirit of thankfulness is life eternal, not for another world beyond the flaming gateway of the day of doom, but life eternal here and now, above the misery around us and the sin within us. And of this the Supper of the Lord bears witness till He come.

XXIII.

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

“Why seek ye the living among the dead?”—LUKE xxiv. 5.

“The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin.”—
1 JOHN i. 7.

OUR subject is the blood of Christ; and it brings us to the living Saviour throned in heaven, not to the dead one laid in Joseph's tomb. We see so little of blood except in death that when we hear of the blood of Christ, we think of nothing but His death. Yet blood in Scripture means life, not death; and the great sacrifice for sin was quite as much our Saviour's resurrection as His death.

It is a great mistake to fancy that the atonement for sin in a Jewish sacrifice lay in the slaughter of the victim. This was only the way in which the blood was obtained for further use: and it was obtained in this way in order that the offerer who killed it (for the killing was his duty, not the priest's) might with his own hands confess that his sin deserved death. Neither was the burning of the victim on the altar anything more than a reverent and convenient way of disposing of it. The atone-

ment was neither in the killing nor in the burning: it was made when the priest sprinkled the blood on the horns of the altar, "for the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it you upon the altar to make an atonement for your lives: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement through the life" that is in it.

Thus there were two separate parts in a sacrifice. The blood indeed was the same in both, and in both was given as living, and not as dead. First it was poured out in death, as a sign that the sinner gave himself to the death his sin deserved. Then it was sprinkled—warm and living blood—after death on the horns of the altar, in token that the sinner saved through death makes his recovered life an offering of thanksgiving to God. Thus even in sacrifices for sin the real sacrifice is always thanksgiving.

Now turn to the one true sacrifice on Golgotha, of which all the rest were only signs and shadows. Consider Christ as the sacrifice for the sin of the world. Then the crucifixion answers to the slaughter of the victim, and is a necessary step of the sacrifice, but it is not itself the finished sacrifice. Christ laid down His life that He might take it again. He gave Himself to death not simply that He might die, but that He might pass through death unto life. Then comes the resurrection, carrying with it the ascension as a necessary consequence; and in this the risen Son of Man, in whom our life is hid, presents to the Father the life He has won through death. The crucifixion

is only the dying of the corn of wheat; in the resurrection it springs up again and bears much fruit. Thus it is a great mistake to suppose that the sacrifice of the Cross was finished on the Cross. Something indeed was finished, as He said; but that was only His humiliation upon earth. He had still to present Himself, and His people with Him, as a living sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Father. If the crucifixion declared our forgiveness, it still remained for the resurrection to seal our consecration as a holy people. Thus the resurrection is not simply a flourish of triumph over a finished work: it is itself the work, and the crucifixion only made it possible. We are not saved simply by our Saviour's death, for then we should still be saved if He had remained for ever in the grave; but by the life He won through death. Neither is it simply from Christ crucified that our life is flowing, but from the risen Son of Man enthroned in heaven. The Cross becomes an idol the moment it makes us forget that our concern is not with the dead Christ, but with our risen Saviour.

Now turn to ourselves, and mark the order of things. Forgiveness first, then holiness. The natural man is always trying to turn it round the other way, as if he could not be saved without showing that Christ's words are false, "Without me ye can do nothing." The difficulty of the Christian life is not in working out our own salvation, for strength will be given us to do it, but in first accepting our forgiveness. This is the difficulty, for it utterly humbles our

pride ; and pride is the very last sin the natural man is willing to part with. He will do any quantity of painful observances to earn His forgiveness, and drink up humiliation itself like water, if only he can save his pride by making a merit of it : but the one thing God requires is the one thing he will never do. This pride is the one thing that separates us from God ; and it must be killed before we can have peace with God. Here is the difficulty. The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak : and pride is the subtlest and most pertinacious of all sins. Drive it out at the door, and it will come back through the window ; trample down its grosser shapes, and it will come transformed into an angel of light. This is what represents the crucifixion in our own lives. It is not in outward persecutions only that we are partakers of Christ's sufferings, for the hardest of the battle is within, where we have to fight with the pride which seems our very nature.

But now look to the Saviour's resurrection, and to the assurance it gives us that the strength at our command for the battle is not the strength of sinful men, nor yet the strength of angels, but the strength of Christ who sits in heaven. In that strength the weakest of us all is strong enough to conquer pride itself. And now imagine this root of evil once for all removed. What then ? Remember the mighty cleansing power of thankfulness, even to some frail sinner like ourselves—how it lifts us far above our baser self to unimagined heights of purity and joy.

Now let that smouldering fire be fanned to a bright and glowing flame of thankfulness to Him that died for our sins—yea rather rose again and is alive for evermore. It is the living Christ who fans that flame from day to day. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." It is not merely that we have forgiveness through the dead Christ: it is the risen living Christ who gives of His life, and cleanses us from all sin. And who shall put a limit to His cleansing power, if only we truly give ourselves to it?

XXIV.

THE POWER OF THE CROSS.

“Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”—1 COR. ii. 2.

IF you know what a great seaport is like, such as Liverpool or the East of London, you know pretty well what Corinth was like in St. Paul’s time. It had harbours full of ships and streets full of ships’ people, and every language under heaven was shouted on its quays. Here were the great warehouses, there the petty shops for ships’ tackle, and there again the slums of sailors and fishermen, dotted all over with drink-shops and homes of vice—for nowhere was vice more rampant than in Corinth. There were no churches yet, pointing silently to heaven, no Sundays to call men back from utter worldliness, no homes of mercy to care for the sick and needy. Yet nowhere in the wide world could the Apostle find a more vivid mass of human life to work upon, or one more like this modern world of ours.

For it was not simply a crowd of some sort which filled the streets of Corinth, but the very sort of crowd you will find any day in those of London or

New York. The Jew and the Greek are always with us, for they are men of all ages. If you do not find literal Jews and Greeks in a London crowd, Jews and Greeks are the sort of men you will find. It is as true of London as it was of Corinth, that some of us want a sign as the Jews did, while others look for wisdom like the Greeks. One man takes everything on authority, as if wisdom were buried with his fathers; another leans to his own understanding, as if wisdom were born with himself. The one looks to custom and tradition, which are the power of the past; the other to his own imagination, and fancies that the wisdom of the future. The one's religion is in formalities and superstition, the other's in idle sentiment and empty sophistry. Give us a miracle, cries one, to crush our doubts. No, says the other, let us have something to admire and dispute about. They both imagine a God of caprice instead of holiness; but with one it is the caprice of power, with the other the caprice of weakness. Most men fall into these two groups, and the natural man always belongs to one or the other.

So the Apostle came into a very modern city, as various in its life and thought as any of our own. He had to deal with all ranks of society, from the great proconsul Gallio and the treasurer Erastus downward, and with every stage of culture, from the rough sailors on the quays to the most learned philosopher of the schools—as miscellaneous a crowd of men as ever you can find in London Docks. Now, what was

he going to do? A simple gospel of Christ crucified might be very good for simple folk in the back parts of Asia; but here in civilized Corinth, in the midst of keen and unfriendly critics, he needed to look warily round him. What then was he to do? He might challenge the Jews with miracles, for he had power to work them, and it came out freely later on. He might meet the Greeks on their own ground of learning for he was a keen disputer, and might have held his own in any battle of the schools. Either of these courses might be good: the one thoroughly bad plan was to preach a gospel which he had always found a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks. It was the one thing Jews and Greeks could heartily agree to ridicule and hate.

Yet this is the one thing he does. He preaches Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. He makes the Cross the centre of his teaching, and bates them nothing from the shame and horror of the story. Thank God, none of our hatreds will compare with the shuddering disgust of men for anyone who was crucified. Our deepest loathing of some Spanish butcher may faintly represent it. So St. Paul directly challenges the uttermost horror of the ancient world. Behold all men, he seems to say,—behold all men this vilest of all miscreants, this Jesus who was crucified. You that require a sign; He is the power of God. You that seek after wisdom; He is the wisdom of God. You hanged Him on a tree to measureless contempt, and heaped on Him every shame and every cruelty

that wicked men could think of. You made Him the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, a by-word and a curse of men. You do well to remind us of the accursed thing, for this Jesus whom you crucified God crowned with glory and honour on the Cross itself. Your thoughts were all of hatred and murder; far out of your sight was the lofty ruling of the grace of God, that He should taste of death for every man.

“For every man”—for high and low, rich and poor, without regard to place or race or age or sex or time—for you and me, whoever we may be, for He is nearer to each one of us than any of us are to each other. Therefore the Cross of Christ is the gospel for all men. The simple can lift themselves up to it, and the wise and mighty must stoop down to it; for the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

We cannot afford to gloss over the horror of the Cross. Suppose for a moment that the Son of Man had died the common death of all men, or at any rate some death less horrible than crucifixion. It may be that He would still have risen with power from the dead; but then His resurrection would no longer be the final and all-sufficing witness of our Heavenly Father's love. If human wickedness had not done its uttermost on Golgotha, we could never feel sure that no sin soever of our own is past forgiveness. If there is mercy for the mockers on Golgotha, we know that there is mercy for us. The very horror of the Cross is our assurance of the infinite and boundless reach of

mercy. Nothing short of that supreme abomination would have enabled St. Paul to throw down the challenge which is the charter of our eternal hope: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Yet if the Cross looks up to the loftiest glories of another world, it also points down to the vilest deeps of this world's sin. Think well how hateful was that sin for which our Saviour was contented to suffer death upon the Cross. Once more the horror of the Cross is the measure of God's hatred of sin—and of our sin in particular, for we too are partakers in His blood. The excuse that we were not on Golgotha will not avail us if we crucify to ourselves the Son of God afresh by deliberately turning back to sin that we have once escaped.

God grant us better things than these: but go home and think over the solemn thoughts which I have laid before you. We preach Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. The gospel He sends us is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? Yet one thing we know in Christ and are sure of—that only through the Cross of shame the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

XXV.

THE INCARNATION AS A SIGN.

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—JOHN iii. 16.

THE problem of evil in the world—of all the misery and wickedness and wrong we see around us—was an old one even in Job’s time, and it is not answered yet. Even the gospel explains only some of it; and without the gospel there is really a good deal to be said for the belief that there is no God at all, or at any rate no such God of love as we know.

Look, for instance, at our social misery. Thousands among us are living on the edge of starvation, without enough of either food or clothing to keep them in health, and hardly knowing where to get a meal from day to day. Many of them have come to this condition by their own fault, commonly through drink or dishonesty; but others were born into it, and never had much chance of escape, while others again have been brought to it by no fault of their own. We are mostly workers of one sort or another; and any man may be thrown out of his work by

sickness or accident, by strikes or lock-outs, by changes in the fashion, by new machinery, or by the movements of trade. Very few even of the richer classes are beyond the reach of misfortunes like these. Pestilence, again, or earthquake may devastate a country, while wars or misgovernment may ruin whole nations at a time.

But poverty is not the worst of evils. Our troubles are of mind, body, or estate; and these are put in the right order. What is the good of wealth without health to use it? And what is the gain even of health if we are consumed with distress of mind? Many a wealthy man would gladly give his riches for a labourer's health; and many another would give up health itself for the joy that shines on some invalid's face. Our keenest sufferings are not in poverty, or even in sickness, but in the shame and bitterness of a guilty mind.

But there is worse in evil than the suffering of the guilty. However this may stir our pity, it cannot shock our conscience. It is a worse thing if the innocent suffer with the guilty or in their place, and peradventure the wicked triumph over them. When the mother wears herself out over a sick-bed, the evil is half hidden from us by the glory of her self-devotion; but we see the horror of it when some villain betrays hearts that trusted him, when the innocent are destroyed for his sake, or when the very children are born to an inheritance of suffering. It may be natural, but something in us cries out that it

is not right, and would not be natural if Nature had not somehow gone wrong.

Even this is not the worst. Evil would be bad enough if it came alike on bad and good, as in one sense it does, for Nature has no respect of persons. But the wicked are partly shielded by their very wickedness. Rough and coarse men feel pain and shame less than others; and even the stings of conscience lose their sharpness for the worst of sinners. Only serve the devil heartily enough, and you can laugh to scorn the deep despair of others who are less wicked than yourself. Nobody is lost yet who feels the torments of a bad conscience. If a man were to commit the sin that hath never forgiveness, it would not trouble him: the deepest remorse is when a better man is overtaken in sin, and loses for a while his hold on Christ. Thus though evil comes alike on bad and good, the good feel it more keenly, and therefore in a practical sense it comes more on them.

Now what a world is this of evil. Nature goes her way without regard to man, and crushes him the moment he gets into the wrong place. Man himself is the doer and the victim of every sort of wrong and wickedness. Even conscience, which is the voice of God if anything is, appears to smite with a strangely unequal and unjust hand. How comes all this? The riddle is a dark one, and many strange answers have been given to it. Some have lost all faith in such a God as ours, and set in His place a blind

necessity or fate which does its work without regard to what we call right and wrong. Others have thought that the world must be partly if not wholly the work of some evil being. If there is a God, say they, either He cannot hinder evil or He will not; and it does not matter which is the truth.

Yet something seems to tell us that God does not love evil, and even that He allows it only for some good purpose, and therefore only for a time. Even without the gospel, we cannot but hope that evil will not for ever triumph, that the wrongs of the earth shall somehow be righted, and that in some other world those who gave their life to truth and duty shall somehow find it again. If we had some clear sign from heaven that God is good, we might rest in this hope; but without one everything is formless and without proof—a mere hope and nothing more. Without the gospel we have no assurance, no single fact which we can set against the universal law that life must end in death. We can only say that hope springs up, we know not whence or how; but the truth we cannot know. All honour to the saints of heathenism, who fought the good fight of duty in the darkness of a world where Christ was yet unknown.

But in Christ we can know and we do know; “for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here is a sign from heaven far beyond all that we could

ask or think. It is not merely the condescension of infinite greatness to infinite littleness, but the costliest of all sacrifices, by which our Heavenly Father of His tender love has redeemed His perishing children from sin and death. Now if this thing is true, it belongs to a higher order than the evil we see in the world. After all, we see but a narrow space, between the unknown from which we come and the unknown to which we go; and what we see within that narrow space must be read in the light of this supreme and final proof of love divine, that God spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all. So awful is the sternness of love. If we cannot even yet fully solve the problem of evil, we have a full assurance from heaven that the face behind the iron mask of this world's order is a face of love as well as holiness. And this is enough, enough to turn the heathen's vague dreams of the future into our own sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

"So God loved the world." His glory shines in earth as well as heaven. It is no more dimmed by sin than the sunlight is dimmed by the dirt of the streets. Sun and moon and stars and light obey His law. Fire and hail, snow and vapours, wind and storm, fulfil His word. Only man is wicked, and even man, rebellious man, can do no more than spell out day by day the letters of His sentence for the day of doom. You may cast God's will behind your back; but you cannot break His law. If the law

of perfect freedom does not please you, the law of sin will hold you fast.

It is a glorious world still, in spite of all the misery that sin has made. Though the stain is dark and ancient, coming down from primeval man, maybe from a world of mystery beyond him, there is something still beyond it. If ever you are tempted to despair as you look out on the wide scene of this world's misery, look again, and look beyond it to the cross on Golgotha which witnesses of our Father's love, and beyond that again to the throne in heaven where sits the risen Son of Man, and where He has promised to him that overcometh that he shall sit with Him. Look unto Jesus, and go forth with strengthened faith and hope renewed to do your part in the warfare to which He calls you. The victory is yours if you are His, and the crown of life is laid up for you. For "he that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

XXVI.

THE CURSE OF MEROZ.

“Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord,
Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof;
Because they came not to the help of the Lord,
To the help of the Lord against the mighty.”

JUDG. v. 23.

GOD never gave Israel a more glorious deliverance than this from Jabin king of Hazor. For twenty years he had mightily oppressed them; and even now there seemed small hope of victory. Barak must have felt his weakness as he saw from the slopes of Tabor the great host of Sisera coming up before him and spreading its long lines of chariots over the plain of Megiddo below. What were the ten thousand men at his feet against so many? But there were powers that fought from heaven that day. A deluge of rain burst in the face of the enemy, and down flew Barak on them. It was more a slaughter than a battle. The dreaded chariots were stuck fast in the mud, with their horses plunging vainly to get free. The destruction was complete. Sisera himself escaped eastward to the Jordan valley, to meet his doom in Jael's tent; but his army struggled back through the

miry plain into a gulf of destruction at its end. No sword was needed to slay them. The swollen waters of the Kishon swept away the fugitives by thousands as they rushed down through the narrowing hills to the gap of Harosheth, and there, where the swollen river closed the pass, there was an end of the grand army of Jabin king of Hazor. Scarcely one can have escaped.

It was a national victory, too, not a private possession of two heroic tribes. North and South had joined to win it, and tribes from Naphtali to distant Benjamin. It was the common triumph of united Israel. Well might Deborah begin her song :

“For that the leaders took the lead in Israel,
For that the people offered themselves willingly,
Praise ye the Lord.”

The Lord Himself had led His people to the battle as He led their fathers through the wilderness ; and the storm that burst on Tabor was no less His doing than the tempest which broke up the granite rocks of Sinai. Then in the midst of this exultant strain she remembers that one city in the midst of enthusiasm had been cold and selfish, deaf to the voice of duty, careless of Jehovah's call. So straight she turns on the traitor city with the words of burning wrath which have stamped its name with infamy for ever :

“Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord,
Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof ;
Because they came not to the help of the Lord,
To the help of the Lord against the mighty.”

158 THE SACRIFICE OF THANKFULNESS

We know no more than this of Meroz—not even where the city was. It is never mentioned again in Scripture or elsewhere. Its name has perished, its very ruins are unknown: nothing is left of it but this one word of everlasting shame.

This is the curse of selfishness. Meroz was a city of Israel, and might have fought for Israel in the hour of Israel's danger; but they liked better to play a selfish game of their own. They could not believe that God's enemy must perish, even though it were the mighty Jabin. Had he not nine hundred chariots of iron? So it was not prudent to help the band which fought the battle of the Lord of Hosts. If Barak prevailed, they would share the victory they had not helped to win; if Sisera prevailed, they could make a merit of having had nothing to do with the revolt. Either way, they would be gainers. So they played their selfish game, and this is their reward: and like theirs shall be the reward of every man who makes his life a selfish game. Be his talents what they may, his sin shall find him out.

High over the cliffs of the Northumberland coast rise the stately ruins of Dunstanburgh Castle, the work of the great Earl Thomas of Lancaster; and in more ways than one methinks they speak of him. Earl Thomas was a mighty man indeed, with four great earldoms in his hand, the people devoted to him, the king helpless to resist him. No man ever held a more commanding place in England, or a greater power for good. Earl Thomas threw it all

away. He played a base and selfish game of his own, and came to a shameful end. So it was but fitting that his lofty castle should be given to the owls and the bats. Its majestic ruins do but witness of its builder's infamy. Earl Thomas is forgotten; and they that remember him remember him for shame.

So shall it be with every man that makes his life a selfish game, that schemes to get riches and honour by other means than sober duty, or lays his base plans to make gain of his neighbour's distress or danger. We need no angel of the Lord to speak the curse of Meroz, for it is branded on him in letters that all can read. Even the worldling scorns the coward, and the meanest of selfish schemers despises the man that is like himself. I do not say that the selfish man will not fare well in this world—far from it. He may be an able man in his way; and whoso lays himself out for wealth with all his heart and all his soul and all his mind is likely to get wealth. This is why some of the very worst men are great worldly successes—because they serve the devil with a perfect heart. In fact, the devil is not a bad paymaster, if you are content with his wages, and can do without treasure in heaven. But what is the good of riches and honour won this way? What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and defile himself with selfishness? There is no sin that the merest worldling hides more anxiously; and there is none he hides more vainly, for there is none that the world finds out with surer instinct, or judges with such merciless severity.

Even in this world's court, selfishness is the sin of sins. What does it matter if men do not curse you to your face? They may speak with bated breath, and give you honour with their lips; but many a quiet sign will tell you what they think of you. If you lose your selfish game, you are despised and forgotten, which is best for you; if you win it, you are despised and remembered, but remembered for shame, as Meroz is remembered. The world may forget you, but it will not remember you for good.

And it were well for us if God forgot us too. Some indeed of the things the world hates and scorns are right and good with Him; but selfishness is not of this kind. He that spoke the curse of Meroz will not hold him guiltless who does the works of Meroz. Nay more, though the Lord Himself cursed no man, words of His go deeper than the angel's bitter curse. "He that is not with me is against me." You cannot be neutral. You may side with Christ or Satan; but you must make your choice between them, or Satan will do it for you. He that comes not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty—he is doing the devil's work, even when he seems to be doing nothing at all.

After all, the men of Meroz were but common sinners. You may see their like in the street any day. There is no more obstinate delusion than this of thinking it enough not to side with Satan. You would like to have Christ's righteousness, perhaps even to seek it; but you see no need to seek it *first*.

Your heart is in this world, and the other can wait. Meanwhile it is enough to be generally respectable. Some day you really will turn devout; but this forsooth is as much as God requires of you now, unless indeed He sends you some grim warning in the form of sickness. So you go on, serving the devil, looking back every now and then after righteousness, but serving the devil from one day to the next, and hardening day by day and year by year in wickedness.

Mere terror will never bring us back to God. An angel's curse could do no more than fright us for a while, for no man ever sinned a sin the less for fear of hell. But Christ our Saviour's voice can wake the dead. He gave Himself for us without reserve. For as He lived among sinners, for us He died the death of sinners. We are His, and doubly His. He made us, He preserves us, He redeemed us with His blood; and now He gives the crown of life to them that love Him. And there is but one offering of love He will receive from us—that or nothing. It is ourselves, our whole selves of body, soul, and spirit as a living sacrifice of thanksgiving. He laid down His life for us; and though He may not call us to lay down our life for Him, He calls each one of us to live his life to Him. If we do it with a true heart and not like Meroz, He shall one day give us too the martyr's vision of the heavens opened and the Son of Man at the right hand of God, not sitting in His glory, but risen from His throne and standing to receive us.

XXVII.

THE BLESSING OF THOSE WHO SAW.

“Verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”—MATT. xiii. 17.

THE occasion of these words is the question, “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” The disciples have rightly seen that the parable of the Sower marks a change in our Lord’s method of teaching, and proceed to ask its meaning. The answer is in effect that if men do not wish to understand Him, they need not ; and therefore He throws His teaching into a form which only willing hearts will care to follow. If men choose to shut their spiritual eyes, they shall see with the eyes of sense and not perceive. Not so with the disciples. Their faith is weak, their hearts are slow, but they are not unloving or untrue ; and therefore is it given to them gradually to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven as they are able to bear them. Blessed are your eyes, for they see ; and your ears, for they hear. After this our Lord explains the parable of the Sower ; and when

they ask Him that of the Tares, He declares that too. He works out, so to speak, a couple of examples, and leaves the rest as problems for the willing hearts of all ages.

But the saying comes again with a little variation in a different connexion; and we must also look at this. You will find it in Luke x. 24. The seventy have come back from their mission with joy. "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in thy name." But the Lord was looking deeper, to the fall from heaven of the prince of demons, and to the Father's method of revelation,—that spiritual truth is given not to the wise and prudent, but to the pure in heart and true. "And turning to his disciples apart, he said," etc.

Now you will observe that neither of these passages places the blessing in any special connexion with the working of miracles. "Howbeit in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." They are not blessed because their eyes have seen wonders and powers and mighty signs, or because their outward ears have heard the words of Him who spake as never man spake, but because they had spiritually seen and spiritually heard the spiritual realities of the unseen universe in which we live. They had not merely known Christ after the flesh, as peradventure Saul of Tarsus knew Him, but also seen His glory as the glory of the Son of God, dwelling full of grace and truth among them.

Yes, blessed were their eyes who saw the Lord ; and no less blessed are our own, if we can see Him too. Doubtless we cannot see Him with the eyes of sense as they did. We cannot walk with Him in Galilee and hear His gracious words and tell Him all our doubts. He never taught in our streets, and we never cast out demons in His name. But what of this, when we have something better still ? If the spirit is nearer than the flesh, our risen Lord is nearer to us now in heaven than His bodily presence ever was to His disciples. If He sitteth at the right hand of the Father, where is the place where God's right hand is not ? Not at His holy table only is His loving presence with us, but in every word of prayer and thankfulness we lift to Him, and in every righteous action which is done on earth.

It is true that the disciples heard the words of life which we can only read ; that they spoke with Him face to face, while we have to look back through the mists of many centuries. But our loss is much less real than it seems, for no mere lapse of time can in the least impair the certainty of either spiritual perception or historic evidence. That which is written is for ever written, and that which is spiritually known is of another order than that of space or time. In many ways we are gainers by the distance of our point of view. To the disciples all was new and strange ; whereas we have an old familiar story we can ponder at our leisure. It is not the eyewitnesses of a great revolution who best see its meaning, or the

personal friends of a great man who can best assign his place in history. They are witnesses, but we are judges; and our task of judgment is not growing harder in these latter days. If it is true, as I for one believe, that history is a revelation of God, it follows that the further we leave behind the carnal presence of the Lord, the brighter is the light which the lengthening ages throw on the mystery of His eternal counsel. As the sons of men are borne along the stream of time, fresh influences at every turn are wafted to them from the unseen world through which they travel. God's teachings are very slow, but they are effective. Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever. On whatever side of Christ our Master's teaching He concentrates in any age the light of history, that side is thenceforth bright with light of its own. The doctrines, for example, of the unity of nature and the brotherhood of mankind, which inspire our scientific and social advance, are old lessons of the gospel which our fathers knew; but in our own generation the teaching of God in history has impressed them with a depth and clearness which the years of many generations will hardly obliterate.

One reason still remains, and that the weightiest of all, for the belief that we are yet more highly favoured than the men who received their blessing from the Lord's own lips. After all, the Incarnation is in itself a carnal thing. The flesh through which the glory of the Son of God was manifested was also a veil which hid its brightness. So long as He lived

as a man among men, it was very hard for even His most devoted followers to avoid thinking of the conditions of that human life as permanent. Even after the resurrection they were still dreaming of an earthly kingdom for the Son of David. It was good to know Him after the flesh, but only if that knowledge led onward to a higher one. The dispensation of the Spirit could not begin till the access to the throne of grace was made manifest by the rending of that flesh in death.

But the greater our privilege, the greater the danger of disobedience. If it was better for Sodom and Gomorrah than for the cities which refused Him when He spake on earth, how will it be with us if we refuse Him when He speaks from heaven? His voice may not seem now to shake both earth and heaven, but we can hear it in our hearts if we will: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. May God, who teaches our hearts by the light of His Holy Spirit, grant us all by the same Spirit to win this higher blessing, and to rejoice in His holy comfort evermore.

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